

**Philosophy and Gender Issues**  
**PHI 315**



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre  
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development

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*General Editor:* Prof. Bayo Okunade

**University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre**  
University of Ibadan,  
Nigeria  
Telex: 31128NG  
Tel: +234 (80775935727)  
E-mail: [ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng](mailto:ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng)  
Website: [www.dlc.ui.edu.ng](http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng)

### **Vice-Chancellor's Message**

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka  
Vice-Chancellor

## **Foreword**

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

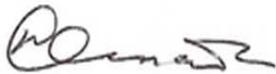
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bayo Okunade', written in a cursive style.

Professor Bayo Okunade  
Director

## Course Development Team

Content Authoring

Content Editor

Production Editor

Learning Design/Assessment Authoring

Managing Editor

General Editor

Lanre-Abass B

Prof. Remi Raji-Oyelade

Dr. Gloria O. Adedoja

SchulPortals Technologies

Ogunmefun Oladele Abiodun

Prof. Bayo Okunade

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## Study Session 1: Defining Philosophy

### Introduction

This study session is meant to familiarize you with the definition of philosophy as put forward by philosophers like Plato, Karl Marx, Wittgenstein, Francis Bacon, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Bertrand Russell. In the process of your study, the branches of philosophy and the central concern of each of them will be well discussed.

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 Define Philosophy
- 1.2 Highlight the Branches of Philosophy
- 1.3 Identify the Central Concern of each of these Branches

#### 1.1 What is Philosophy?

According to **Anthony Quinton**, many definitions of philosophy are controversial because what has been called philosophy has changed radically in scope in the course of history. The shortest definition, which is quite a good one, is that philosophy is thinking about thinking.



**Figure 1.1:** Anthony Quinton

**Source:** <http://i.ytimg.com/vi/GmbGbo-oyKc/0.jpg>

That brings out the generally second-order character of the subject, as reflective thought about particular kinds of thinking (formation of beliefs, claims to knowledge) about the world or large parts of it.

### Box 1.1: Shortest Definition of Philosophy

Philosophy is thinking about thinking

A more detailed, but uncontroversial definition is that philosophy is rationally critical thinking of a more or less systematic kind about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of knowledge), and the conduct of life (ethics or theory of value).

**Peter A. Angeles**, in his Dictionary of Philosophy, explains that the meanings of philosophy are as diverse as philosophers are. He listed five basic definitions as given in table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1: Definitions of Philosophy according to Peter A. Angeles**

1	To give a speculative, systematic, complete view of reality
2	To describe the ultimate, real, nature of reality
3	To determine the limits, scope, source, nature, validity, and value, of knowledge
4	The critical inquiry regarding the presuppositions, and claims, made by the different fields of knowledge
5	A discipline to get you to 'see' what you say and say what you 'see'

#### 1.1.1: An Overview of the General Definitions of Philosophy

The definitions of philosophy can be summarized as following:

1. Love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline.
2. Investigation of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods.
3. A system of thought based on or involving such inquiry: the philosophy of Hume.
4. The critical analysis of fundamental assumptions or beliefs.
5. The disciplines presented in university curriculums of science and the liberal arts, except medicine, law, and theology.
6. The discipline comprising logic, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and epistemology.
7. A set of ideas or beliefs relating to a particular field or activity; an underlying theory: an original philosophy of advertising.
8. A system of values by which one lives: has an unusual philosophy of life.

### 1.1.2 Definitions of Philosophy by Various Philosophers

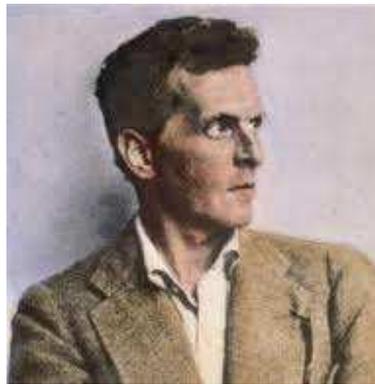
Some philosophers came up with several definitions of philosophy such as given below:

#### **Karl Marx**

Karl Marx defined philosophy and said ‘Philosophy is an interpretation of the world in order to change it’.

#### **Ludwig Wittgenstein**

Ludwig Wittgenstein said "The object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of ‘philosophical propositions’, but to make propositions clear.



**Figure 1.2:** Ludwig Wittgenstein

**Source:** <http://media-2.web.britannica.com/eb-media/94/93294-004-FC68754E.jpg>

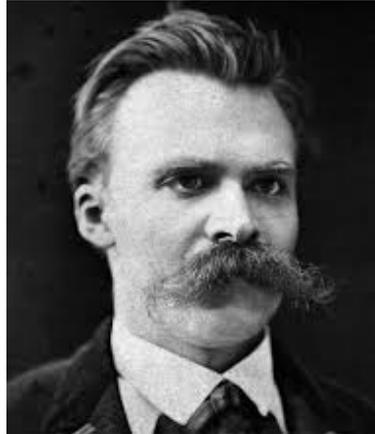
Philosophy should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred."

#### **Plato**

According to Plato “Philosophy is the acquisition of knowledge”. Again, for Plato, wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.

#### **Friedrich Nietzsche (A)**

Friedrich Nietzsche is of the opinion that “Philosophers are not honest enough in their work, although they make a lot of virtuous noise when the problem of truthfulness is touched even remotely.



**Figure 1.3:** Friedrich Nietzsche

**Source:** <http://tarangini.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/wholedude-wholemorality-nietzsche.jpg>

They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic, while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of “inspiration” most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact”.

### **Friedrich Nietzsche (B)**

"To grasp the limits of reason – only this is truly philosophy."

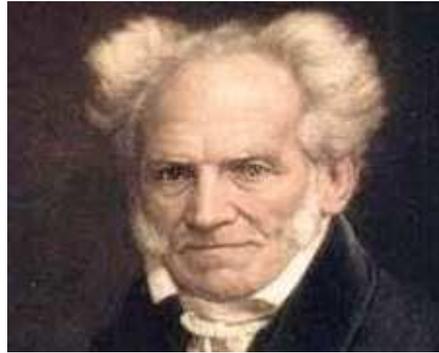
Define Philosophy according to Karl Marx

### **Francis Bacon**

Francis Bacon believed that "philosophy only is the true one which reproduces most faithfully the statements of nature, and is written down, as it were, from nature's dictation, so that it is nothing but a copy and a reflection of nature, and adds nothing of its own, but is merely a repetition and echo.”

### **Arthur Schopenhauer**

Arthur Schopenhauer said that "To repeat abstractly, universally, and distinctly in concepts the whole inner nature of the world, and thus to deposit it as a reflected image in permanent concepts always ready for the faculty of reason, this and nothing else is philosophy."



**Figure 1.4:** Arthur Schopenhauer

**Source:** [http://www.emersonkent.com/images/schopenhauer\\_arthur.jpg](http://www.emersonkent.com/images/schopenhauer_arthur.jpg)

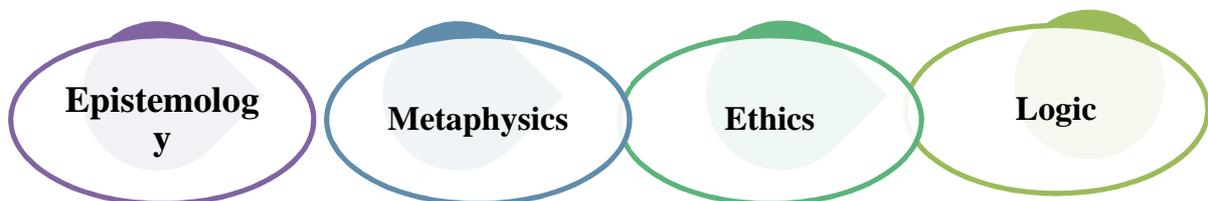
### **Bertrand Russell**

"The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as to seem not worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it."

- Who defined Philosophy as an interpretation of the world in order to change it'.
- A. Ludwig Wittgenstein
- B. Plato
- C. Karl Marx
- D. Friedrich Nietzsche
- E. Francis Bacon
- Answer is (B) Karl Marx

## **1.2 Major Branches of Philosophy**

There are about four major branches of philosophy; these branches are listed in the figure below with explanations following.



**Figure 1.5:** Major Branches of Philosophy

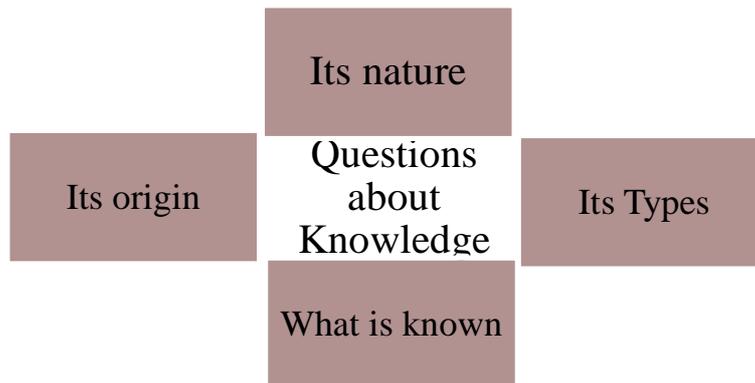
**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

### **1.2.1 Epistemology**

This is an enquiry into the nature and ground of knowledge, belief and experience. "What can we know and how do we know it?" are questions central to philosophy and knowledge forms the

main topic of epistemology along with other cognitive notions like belief, understanding, reason, judgment, sensation, imagination, supposing, guessing, learning, forgetting and so on.

Questions about knowledge can be divided into four main, though overlapping groups. These questions concern four major areas as given the figure below:



**Figure 1.6:** Questions about Knowledge

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

Knowledge clearly differs in its nature from purely psychological states like feeling sure, for in straightforward contexts, the word ‘know’, like ‘realize’ ‘refute’ and many other words can only be used by a speaker who himself has certain beliefs on the matter in question.

It is often thought that knowledge is justified true belief, but even if belief is involved, there are objections to this view. No agreed account has yet been produced of what counts as justification and sometimes no justification seems called for:

Do we have to justify claims to know our own intentions or where our limbs are? Some say we have a special knowledge without observation of certain things for example (in normal health) where our limbs are, which others can only know by observing us. Obviously, therefore, if one is in error, one does not have knowledge.

### 1.2.2 Metaphysics

Metaphysics literally means ‘That which comes after ‘physics’, the latter being the study of nature in general. Thus the questions of metaphysics arise out of but go beyond, factual or scientific questions about the world.

A central part of metaphysics is **ontology**. Ontology is the study of ‘Being’ and in particular, nowadays, ‘what there is’, for example material objects, minds, persons, universals, numbers, facts and so on. A particular theory about what exists can be called ontology.

Ontology borders on philosophy of religion with questions like: does anything exist necessarily? Is it necessary that something, no matter what, should exist? Can any answer be given to the question, why is there something rather than nothing?

Metaphysics is distinguished by its questions being general. As well as seeking an inventory of kinds of things that exists. It asks what can be said about anything that exists, just in so far as it exists.

Can we classify all that exist into different fundamental kinds in one or more ways? Is there any hierarchy among kinds of things? Do some depend on others for their existence? These questions involve the relations between very general notions like thing, entity, object, individual, universal, particular, substance and also event, process, state here three main, though overlapping metaphysical outlook can be distinguished.

One outlook (for example Plato and the rationalist) takes one or more substances as the basis of the universe. A second takes act and potency (for example Aquinas) and a third takes events and processes (for example Heraclitus, the stoics, Hegel, Bergson and Whitehead).

These outlooks, especially the first and third, are connected with attitudes towards change. Adherents of the first outlook have often held either that change is not fully real, or that the most basic things in the universe do not change except in secondary or unimportant ways.

The third outlook puts change at the heart of things. It does not deny all unity and constancy, which would result in unintelligible chaos, but makes these depend essentially upon change.

- The study of Being is called \_\_\_\_\_
- Ontology

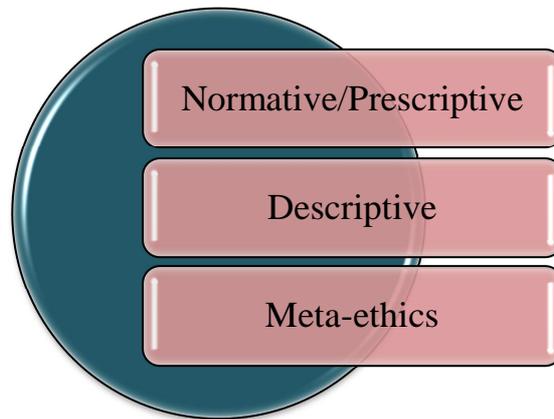
### 1.2.3 Ethics

**Beauchamp** and **Childress** link ethics and morality by asserting ‘that the term morality refers to social conventions about right and wrong human conduct that are so widely shared that they form a stable, though usually incomplete, communal consensus, whereas ethics is a general term referring to both morality and ethical theory’.

Again, one can say that ethics is an enquiry into how men ought to behave. The primary topic is value and the primary concepts are the valuable, the desirable, the good in itself and so on.

These topic are included under ethics though they can be excluded as belonging rather to **axiology**, which is the study of value in general ( in aesthetics, economics and so on as well as ethics) an ethics based primarily on value can be called axiological ethics.

Ethics is divided into three branches as given in the figure below:



**Figure 1.7:** Branches of Ethics

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

### **Normative/Prescriptive**

This branch prescribes how individuals ought to behave. For the deontologist, duty is prior to value; we should act in conformity to duty and our duties, such as promise-keeping, are independent of values. But for the consequentialist, our actions must be targeted towards certain end, to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

### **Descriptive**

This branch examines what moral views are actually held by various people or societies, and whether they are universally held. Such questions involve fact-finding, observation, analysis and interpretation.

### **Meta-ethics**

This deals with the meaning of ethical terms and the criteria for applying them. How do terms relate to each other, including terms like 'bad', 'evil', 'wrong' and so on how do moral uses of these terms relate to non-moral uses, and in general what distinguishes the moral as such? Other questions concern how we should analyze sentences containing these terms.

- The branch of ethics that examines what moral views are actually held by various people or societies, and whether they are universally held is known as \_\_\_\_\_
- Descriptive

### 1.2.4 Logic

Logic deals with the nature of argument. The central topic of logic is valid reasoning, its systematization and the study of notions relevant to it. As a study devoted to valid reasoning, it naturally asks about reasoning in general and how many kinds of it there are. Is all reasoning generally deductive or is there also inductive reasoning? Are there several kinds of validity?

## Summary of Study Session 1

In Study Session 1, you have learnt that:

1. Philosophy is thinking about thinking. It is rationally critical thinking of a more or less systematic kind about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of knowledge), and the conduct of life (ethics or theory of value).
2. According to Peter A. Angeles, philosophy means the critical inquiry regarding the presuppositions, and claims, made by the different fields of knowledge. It is a discipline to get you to 'see' what you say and say what you 'see'
3. Other definitions of philosophy are:
  - ❖ A system of thought based on or involving such inquiry: the philosophy of Hume.
  - ❖ The critical analysis of fundamental assumptions or beliefs.
  - ❖ The disciplines presented in university curriculums of science and the liberal arts, except medicine, law, and theology.
4. According to Plato "Philosophy is the acquisition of knowledge". Again, for Plato, wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder.
5. Arthur Schopenhauer said that "To repeat abstractly, universally, and distinctly in concepts the whole inner nature of the world, and thus to deposit it as a reflected image in permanent concepts always ready for the faculty of reason, this and nothing else is philosophy."
6. The major branches of philosophy are:
  - Epistemology
  - Metaphysics
  - Ethics
  - Logic
7. Ethics is divided into three branches:
  - Normative/Prescriptive
  - Descriptive
  - Meta-ethics

## Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

### SAQ 1.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 1.1)

What in your own view is Philosophy as defined by any three philosophers?

### SAQ 1.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 1.2)

Highlight the major branches of philosophy

### SAQ 1.3 (Tests Learning Outcomes 1.3)

What are the central concerns of these branches?

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## **Study Session 2: Feminism and Gender; an Historical Account**

### **Introduction**

In this study session, you would be taken through the historical account that led to gender studies. Effort will be made to examine the objectives of those that are primarily concerned with changing the course of women.

This is because they believe women have been oppressed and marginalized in various fields of life. Also, you would learn about some versions of feminism and their central concerns.

### **Learning Outcomes for Study Session 2**

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 Highlight the Objectives of Feminists
- 2.2 Explain the distinctions between various versions of feminism.

#### **2.1 The Feminist**

It is no exaggeration to claim that there have been times in different places when women were relegated to the background. To some people, no discussion of women is complete without placing them in the context of home and family.

To others, women are mere sex objects, created to satisfy the sexual urge of men. The economic, social and political discrimination suffered by women raised the consciousness of some group of people called feminists who traced the woman problem to the fact that women were denied the same opportunity as men to develop an identity of their own.

In many cases, cultural conditioning had prevented women from achieving a sense of themselves as persons. Assigned to social roles solely on the basis of sex, women were prevented from seeing themselves as unique human beings.

Similarly, whenever matters that have to do with the needs and concerns of women arise; women are treated as relatively invisible while the interests of men are emphasized. In order to correct this bias, and to alter the distorted conception of the female, there is need for a new perspective.



**Figure 2.1:** The Feminist

**Source:**[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-CA5HnZu63as/T-YsBK0mTXI/AAAAAAAAAMw/h\\_GBbuyAsLsI/s1600/FeminineFeminist.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-CA5HnZu63as/T-YsBK0mTXI/AAAAAAAAAMw/h_GBbuyAsLsI/s1600/FeminineFeminist.jpg)

Today, it seems reasonable to argue that some group of people (both male and female) are fighting against sexual inequalities in economic, social and political institutions, particularly the discrimination against women. These people are called feminist.

### 2.1.1 Objectives of the Feminist

Anybody whose central concern and pre-occupation is to emancipate women is a feminist. Such a person shares the same aim and is committed to female emancipation and a capacity to put this cause in the center of his/her life.

Since women have been oppressed, their experiences correspondingly may have been altered by the instrument of oppression and they may not possess the skills of communicating their experiences in ways that can be readily understood. Feminists, therefore, see part of their tasks as articulating women's reports or enabling women to articulate these reports themselves.

Closely connected to the above is the task of searching out or identifying the oppressive elements that have distorted the experiences of women including the experiences of feminists themselves. A feminist must do her best to identify these oppressive elements and analyze women's unique experiences.

- Who is a feminist?
- A feminist is anybody whose central concern and pre-occupation is to emancipate women

Again, feminist must have an awareness of women's oppression which is conceptualized as patriarchy. Feminist maintain that the oppression of women, that is patriarchy, is codified in legal, educational and religious systems and is ingrained in women's formal relations to one another, particularly their psychology and physiology.

### Box 2.1: The Objectives of the Feminist

- To emancipate women.
- To articulate women's reports or enable women to articulate these reports themselves.
- To identify the oppressive elements that have distorted the experiences of women.
- To put an end to patriarchy either in particular areas or in its entirety.
- To understand women's own perceptions and situations.
- To correct the impression that women are second class citizens.
- To restore women's self-image and self-worth.

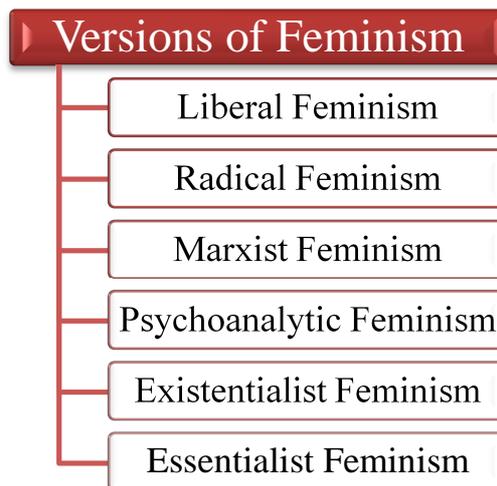
Feminism is directed at social change with the objective of ending patriarchy, either in particular areas or in its entirety. For many women, this is the most important part of feminism because they believe that the elimination of patriarchal structures is the ultimate reason for searching them out and developing theories about them.

Furthermore, since feminism is committed to understanding women's own perceptions and situations, feminists insist that because women as a group have been neglected in the past, we should make special efforts to pay attention to, understand and respect women's reports of their experiences.

Finally, feminists aim at correcting the impression people have about women as second class citizens and also at restoring women's self-image and self-worth.

## 2.2 Versions of Feminism

There are various versions of feminism; some of them are listed in the figure below:



**Figure 2.2:** Versions of Feminism

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

### 2.2.1 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism arises out of the philosophical standpoint known as 'liberalism'. The word 'liberalism' is used in so many ways to mean different things to different people due to its relative meaning, but the essence of liberalism is to achieve individual freedom.

#### Traits of the Liberals

- The liberals are those who are mildly unsatisfied with the condition of the society as they view it and as a result, demand a gradual change in that condition.
- The word 'liberal' signifies a person who is of a skeptical frame of mind.
- Liberals are ever ready to discard old ideas and to embrace new ones.
- They are inclined to view tradition as something to overcome and to be transformed
- A liberal welcomes change in institutional forms.

The main emphasis of liberal feminism is that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance and/or success in the so-called public world.

For the reason that the society has the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and/or physically capable than men, it excludes women from places where important contributions can be made. As a result of this policy of exclusion, the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled.

- What is the essence of Liberalism
- Its essence is to achieve individual Freedom

According to **Susan Wendell**, *Liberal feminism is an historical tradition that grew out of liberalism. It is committed to major economic re-organization and considerable redistribution of wealth.*

*Since one of the modern political goals most closely associated with liberal feminism is equal opportunity, which would undoubtedly require and lead to both.*

One can interpret Wendell by explaining that liberal feminism aims at achieving equality and individual liberty such that no individual will have undue advantaged or is unduly disadvantaged. Such equality will include both legal equality and equal rights to political participation.

- Which of this is **not** a trait of the Liberals?
- A. They are of a skeptical frame of mind
- B. They are ever ready to discard old ideas and to embrace new ones
- C. They welcome change in institutional forms
- D. None of the above
- E. All of the above
- Answer is D(None of the above)

Also, the liberal ideal of individual liberty includes freedom of thought, expression and action with the limitation that no individual should harm one another. All these ideals are developed from the liberal historical tradition.

Susan Wendell further explains that the liberal feminists' tradition, like most other feminist traditions, has always asserted that the value of women as human beings cannot be exchanged for the welfare of men and children and as such, the value of women is equal to the value of men.

Liberal feminists, therefore, demand various forms of public and private recognition of the value of women including respect for their freedom and privacy.

### **Box 2.2: Liberal Ideals of Individual Liberty**

Freedom of thought

Freedom of expression and action

The limitation that no individual should harm one another

They have always promoted equality of legal rights for women and have more recently demanded an end to all forms of discrimination against women, especially discrimination on the basis of sex.

They share the traditional belief in the power of education as a means of social reform and its importance to human fulfillment. Therefore, they demand education for girls and women equal to that given to boys and men.

Notably, liberal feminism's clearest political commitments are very important to the emancipation of women.

Politically, liberal feminists are committed to the promotion of women's greater recognition of their value as individuals, to equality of opportunity, to the promotion of equal education for boys and girls, to ending discrimination based on sex, to equality of legal rights and to the use of education as a major tool for social reform.

### **2.2.2 Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism arises out of the historical tradition termed 'radicalism'. Generally, the term is taken to denote the extreme advance wing of any movement, political, economic, social, religious, racial or sexual. A person who finds the condition of the society unsatisfying and demands for extreme and revolutionary change is a radical.

All radicals, therefore, favour an immediate and fundamental change in society. Radical feminists argue that it is the patriarchal system that oppresses women. This system has to do with power dominance and should be done away with. It is not just patriarchy's legal and political structures that must be overturned; its social and cultural institutions must also go.

- All radicals, favour an immediate and fundamental change in society, True or False?
- True, this is because when a finds the condition of the society unsatisfying, he/she demands for extreme and revolutionary change.

Radical feminism's central concern however, is that heterosexuality is the structure of the oppression of women hence women's biology (especially their reproductive capacities are potential sources of liberating power for them.

Also, because patriarchal ideology defines women in a way specific to their sex, as beings whose special function is to gratify male sexual desires and to bear children, radical feminist demand a radical solution to this description because this way of describing women limits what women can do in a patriarchal society and renders illegitimate whatever they do that goes beyond the limits of such patriarchal definition.

While patriarchy defines women as natural mothers or as sexual objects, the reality, according to radical feminism, is that women under patriarchy are forced mothers and sexual slaves.

According to **Catherine Mackinnon**, the idea of radical feminist move is the opposite of liberal feminist move.

Radical feminism is of the position that we need women's point of view that will criticize all the ways women have been socially created and being excluded from various spheres of life especially politics. This social creation with its claim on the validity of women's experience boils down to the fact that women are actually being oppressed.



**Figure 2.3:** Catherine Mackinnon

**Source:**<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/MacKinnon.8May.CambridgeMA.png>

Mackinnon's observation arises out of a study she conducted concerning female and male participation in sports. From the radical feminist perspective, the question of why women do not participate in sports receives various answers.

Women, she notes, have learned a lot all these years on the sidelines, watching. Women have not only been excluded from resources and participation, they have learnt actual disability, enforced weakness, lack of spirit-body connection in being and in motion.

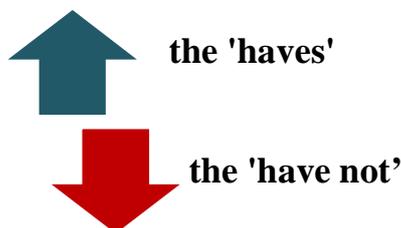
One can quickly add that women are not allowed to participate in sports due to wrong ideas being held about women, illusions about women's weakness, notions and stereotypes about femininity.

All these notions have gone a long way to structure women's psyche and render them not only physically unable to participate in sports, but also unable to realize their potentials as able human beings.

### 2.2.3 Marxist Feminism

The most fundamental assumption in Marxism is Economic Determinism. On this foundation, **Marx** built the rest of his theory. Economic determinism which Marx drew from **Feuerbach's** teaching is the assumption that human beings' primary motivation is economic.

That is, what people do politically, what they think and say is determined by their economic circumstances. The teachings of Marxism can be summarized by explaining that all history is a series of class struggle for economic power between two social classes as given in the figure below:



**Figure 2.4:** The Two Social Classes

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

As 'the have not' grow in number with respect to 'the haves', and as their condition progressively worsens, the point is reached where social revolution resulting in a shift in power relations becomes inevitable. The desire for material wealth underlies all class struggles, and until men are equal in this regard, peace will be impossible.

Marxist feminism focuses on women's work-related concerns. The Marxist-feminist approach sheds some light on, among other things, how the institution of the family is related to capitalism, how women's domestic work is trivialized as not real work and how women are generally given the most boring and lowest paying jobs.

- What is the most fundamental assumption in Marxism?

- A. Economic Deterioration
- B. Economic Determinism
- C. Economic Decision
- D. Economic Development

□ Answer is (B), Economic Determinism

Marxist feminism is of the view that it is impossible for anyone, especially women to obtain genuine equal opportunity in a class-stratified society where the wealth produced by the powerless ends up in the hands of the powerful few.

In articulating the Marxist feminist point, **Nancy Holmstrom** explains that the Marxist feminist believes that to understand why women are oppressed in ways that men are not; we need to analyze the links between women's work status and women's self-image.



**Figure 2.5:** Nancy Holmstrom

**Source:** <http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/sites/fasn/files/nancyholmstrom.jpg?1319680892>

Although fewer women today are full time domestic workers, unlike in the past, they are still prone to think of their primary work and role as that of wife and mother. Their role in the family helps to keep them in an inferior economic and social position.

Even the rare woman who both has a non-traditional job and does not have a family is still shaped by the social-cultural institutions from which she is deviating.

However, Marxist feminists are dissatisfied with the trivialization of the nature and function of women's work under capitalism. They are increasingly regarded as mere consumers, as if the role of men was to earn wages and that of women was to spend them on 'the right products of the capitalist industry'.

- Women's role in the family helps to keep them in an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ position.
- Inferior economic and social position.

Marxist feminists are of the view that women's oppression originated from the introduction of private property, an institution that obliterated whatever quality the human community had previously enjoyed.

Private ownership of the means of production by relatively few persons, originally all male, inaugurated a class system whose contemporary manifestations are corporate capitalism and imperialism.

Reflecting on this state of affairs, it suggests that capitalism itself and not just the larger social rules under which men have privilege over women is the cause of women's oppression. If all women are to be liberated, the capitalist system must be replaced by a socialist system in which the means of production belongs to all.

#### 2.2.4 Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalysis is a method of treating mental disorders. It can be said to be a method of treating various psychic factors which underlie a person's behavioural acts. Interestingly, such a person is unconscious of such psychic factors or one can say that such psychic factors are hidden to the person concerned.

According to **Arnold** and **Eysenck**, on the anthropological and psychological levels, psychoanalysis is a method by means of which it is thought by some to be possible to approach the unresolved problems of human's innermost life.

Differently put, psychoanalysis can be said to be a way of curing people of their health problems. Since the state of our mind supposedly has a direct relationship with our behavioural acts, psychoanalytic feminism sees the problem of oppression which women are complaining about as rooted deep in their psyche.

A way of addressing this problem, it is argued, is to go through the analysis of women's consciousness.

#### **Box 2.3: Definitions of Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis is a method of treating mental disorders

It can be said to be a method of treating various psychic factors which underlie a person's behavioural acts

Psychoanalysis can be said to be a way of curing people of their health problems

According to psychoanalytic feminism, the root of women's oppression has to be traced to their psyche. The explanation is that the present situation of things is as a result of what each woman experienced early in life. Right from the beginning of life, the girl child is not only dependent, she is also disadvantaged.

This is embedded in her psyche until she becomes an adult who is neither self-assertive nor autonomous. The psychoanalytic feminist's prescription, therefore, is that efforts should be directed towards making women independent and autonomous right from their childhood.

### 2.2.5 Existentialist Feminism

Existentialism is a philosophy that strives for living authentically, true to one's own values and insights, living fully, freely, taking responsibility for one's actions, sharpening one's understanding and ultimately moving beyond the confines of the brute here and now as determined by the concrete social environment. In thus striving for authenticity, one is striving for transcendence.

However, existentialist feminism can be traced to **Simone de Beauvoir** who offered an existentialist account of women's situation. De Beauvoir argued that women are oppressed by virtue of 'otherness'. Woman is the other because she is not a man.



**Figure 2.6:** Simone de Beauvoir

**Source:**<https://static-secure.guim.co.uk/sys-images/BOOKS/Pix/pictures/2014/1/9/1389261893620/Simone-de-Beauvoir-016.jpg>

Man is the self, the free determining being who defines the meaning of his existence while woman is the other, the object whose meaning is defined for her. If woman is to become a self, a subject, she must, like man, transcend the definitions, labels and essences limiting her existence. She must make herself be whatever she wants to be.

- The philosophy that strives for living authentically, true to one's own values and insights, living fully, freely and taking responsibility for one's actions is called what?
  - A. Radical
  - B. Existentialism
  - C. Psychoanalytic
  - D. Marxist
- Answer is (B) Existentialism

According to De Beauvoir's analysis of the female condition of otherness, it is natural for people, either collectively or individually to understand their existence in terms of fundamental duality:

- I (Self)
- Things not myself (Other)

The mature adult juxtaposes her or his own needs and perceptions against those of others understanding at the same time that the other person is doing so as well. To me, I am self, you are other but to you, you are self, I am other; I realize and accept that this is so.

This equality of claims to self and otherness from different perspectives is what De Beauvoir terms 'reciprocity'. She explains that the reciprocity of claims to selfness exist between women and men.

The problem, according to De Beauvoir, is that even women perceive men as self rather than as other and themselves as other rather than as self.

Otherness is associated with oppression and inferiority. It is a condition of exclusion, of being shunned, abandoned, marginalized, disadvantaged, unprivileged, rejected, unwanted and in fact not free.

On the other hand, being the self is a condition of being powerful, being able to have one's say and being able to determine one's existence. In short, it is a condition of being free.

### 2.2.6 Essentialist Feminism

Essentialism means a belief in the real, true essence of things. The term 'essentialism' was originally identified by second-wave feminists as the mode of thinking that assumes that all manifestations of gender difference are innate, trans-cultural and historical.

Essentialism in this formulation makes constant reference to biological differences between the sexes by using this logic to explain wider manifestations of sexual difference. This form of biological essentialism was rejected by some feminist in favour of a social constructionist view of gender relations.

**Cressida Heyes** identifies four different senses of essentialism. They are listed in the figure below:



**Figure 2 7:** Senses of Essentialism

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

**Metaphysical Essentialism** is the belief in the real essence of the sexes which exist independently of social creation.

**Biological essentialism** is the belief in real essences which are biological in character.

**Linguistic Essentialism** is the belief that the term 'woman' has a fixed and invariant meaning.

**Methodological essentialism** encompasses approaches to studying women's or men's lives which presuppose the applicability of gender as a general category of social analyses.



**Figure 2.8:** Cressida Heyes

**Source:** [http://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/images/chairholders/Cressida\\_Heyes.jpg](http://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/images/chairholders/Cressida_Heyes.jpg)

Biological essentialism crept into feminist debates in various ways. **Shulamith Firestone**, for instance in her *Dialectics of Sex*, explains that women are oppressed by virtue of their biological capacity to give birth and that the only solution to female oppression is to liberate women from the shackles of child birth through reproductive technologies.



**Figure 2.9:** Shulamith Firestone

**Source:** <http://www.lagai.org/images/Shulamith-Firestone-femin-008.jpg>

Cultural feminist such as **Mary Daly** on the other hand present biological femaleness as essentially superior to biological maleness in that 'feminine' virtues tend to be seen as solely lying with the female sex.



**Figure 2.10:** Mary Daly

**Source:** [http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2010/01/07/us/07daly\\_CA0/articleInline.jpg](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2010/01/07/us/07daly_CA0/articleInline.jpg)

For the essentialist of this version, patriarchal perspectives on femininity act to distort women's real capacities, but underneath that, there is an authentic femaleness which can be celebrated.

In short, radical feminists were typically social constructivists who wanted to render gender irrelevant, while cultural feminists were generally essentialists who sought to celebrate femaleness.

Despite the varieties of strands within these debates, they can be seen to be engaged with an 'essentialism' which has a relatively unitary meaning, deriving from the traditional philosophical understanding of essentialism.

- Who identified four different senses of essentialism?
  - A. Cressida Heyes
  - B. Plato
  - C. Shulamith Firestone
  - D. Mary Daly
  - E. Simone de Beauvoir
- Answer is (A) Cressida Heyes

### 2.2.7 The Philosophical Sense of Essentialism

Philosophically, essentialism is the belief that things have essential properties, properties that are necessary to those things being what they are. Re-contextualized within feminism, essentialism

becomes the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any woman must necessarily have those properties to be a woman at all.

So defined, essentialism entails a closely related view, **universalism**, which is the idea that there are some properties shared by, or common to, all women since without those properties they would not be regarded as women in the first place. Essential properties, then, are also universal.

‘Essentialism’ as generally debated in feminist circles embraces this composite view: that there are properties essential to women and which all women, therefore, share’. It is notable that on this definition of the ‘essentialism’ with which feminists have been concerned, the properties that are essential and universal to all women can either be natural or socially constructed.

This is reflected in that critics of essentialism from the later 1980s and 1990s typically attack any view that ascribes necessary and common characteristics to all women, even if that view identifies those characteristics as culturally constructed.

■ What is Universalism?

- It is the idea that there are some properties shared by, or common to, all women since without those properties they would not be regarded as women in the first place.

Feminist thinkers often use ‘essentialism’ and ‘biological essentialism’ as interchangeable terms (apparently precluding the possibility that essential characteristics of women could be cultural). There is an obvious reason for this, elision. If there are properties necessary to and shared by all women, these properties, qua necessary, can most readily be identified as natural.

Thus, Essentialism easily slides into biological essentialism because women’s necessary properties are most readily identified as biological. Such view on biological essentialism was commonly held prior to second-wave feminism, typically as the view that all women are constituted as women by their possession of wombs, breasts and child-bearing capacity.

Arguably, this view played crucial role in justifying women’s confinement to the domestic sphere as natural necessarily. Second-wave feminists, therefore, opposed essentialism in its pre-feminists biological incarnation.

## Summary of Study Session 2

In Study Session 2, you have learnt that:

1. Cultural conditioning had prevented women from achieving a sense of themselves as persons. Assigned to social roles solely on the basis of sex, women were prevented from seeing themselves as unique human beings.
2. Feminists are some group of people (both male and female) fighting against sexual inequalities in economic, social and political institutions, particularly the discrimination against women. Some of their objectives are:
  - To emancipate women.
  - To put an end to patriarchy either in particular areas or in its entirety.
  - To correct the impression that women are second class citizens.
  - To restore women's self-image and self-worth.
3. There are various versions of Feminism, which are:
  - a. Liberal Feminism
  - b. Radical Feminism
  - c. Marxist Feminism
  - d. Psychoanalytic Feminism
  - e. Existentialist Feminism
  - f. Essentialist Feminism
4. The liberals are those who are mildly unsatisfied with the condition of the society as they view it and as a result, demand a gradual change in that condition.  
Liberals are ever ready to discard old ideas and to embrace new ones.  
They are inclined to view tradition as something to overcome and to be transformed
5. Radical feminism is of the position that we need women's point of view that will criticize all the ways women have been socially created and being excluded from various spheres of life especially politics.
6. The most fundamental assumption in Marxism is Economic Determinism.  
Marxist feminism focuses on women's work-related concerns.
7. According to psychoanalytic feminism, the root of women's oppression has to be traced to their psyche.

8. Existentialism is a philosophy that strives for living authentically, true to one's own values and insights, living fully, freely, taking responsibility for one's actions, sharpening one's understanding.
9. Essentialism in this formulation makes constant reference to biological differences between the sexes by using this logic to explain wider manifestations of sexual difference.  
Senses of Essentialism include:  
Metaphysical Essentialism  
Biological Essentialism  
Linguistic Essentialism  
Methodological Essentialism
10. Philosophically, essentialism is the belief that things have essential properties, properties that are necessary to those things being what they are

## **Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2**

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

### **SAQ 2.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 2.1)**

1, Write short notes on the following:

- (a) Liberal feminism
- (b) Radical feminism
- (c) Existentialist feminism

### **SAQ 2.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 2.2)**

1. Mention 2 demands of the liberal feminists
2. What in your own view is the philosophical essence of essentialism?

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## Study Session 3: Basic Gender Concepts

### Introduction

In this study session, efforts will be directed towards examining various concepts as they are used in gender discourse. The aim is to ensure conceptual clarification since you will be taken through some of these concepts in the course of your study.

Notably, many of these definitions are culled from Margaret Anderson's book, 'Thinking about women': Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender.

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 3.1: Define and use the basic gender concepts in their relevant senses.
- 3.2: Differentiate these various closely related concepts.

#### 3.1: Androcentrism

Androcentrism is derived from the Greek word often used for male. Androcentric practices are those in which the experiences of men are assumed to be generalizable and are seen to provide the objective criteria through which women's experiences can be organized and evaluated.

A related concept is that of phallogocentrism

**Phallogocentrism** is a term which describes those ideas developed around languages or words that are masculine in style.

An early use of the term was made by **Charlotte Perkins Gillman** who explains that in feminist analyses, most societies historically, and in the present, exhibit androcentric tendencies whereby their culture, knowledge, organizations and institutions reflect and reproduce the dominance and power of men.

One simple illustration is provided by the androcentric use of language. In many countries, 'Mankind' and 'men' are widely used in a generic way, instead of the more gender-neutral 'human kind' or 'people'. Similarly, the pronoun 'he' is routinely used in preference to 'she'.

- What are Androcentric practices?
- Androcentric practices are those in which the experiences of men are assumed to be generalizable and are seen to provide the objective criteria through which women's experiences can be organized and evaluated.

Feminists have problematized the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns arguing that such linguistic practices both reflect and contribute to the marginalization of women.

**Gilligan** for instance, explains that the androcentricism embedded in psychological research has led to a disparity between academic theories of 'human' development and the experiences of women, a disparity seen to be caused by women's development rather than the faulty research and theory itself.

In her research, Gilligan included those that were previously left out (women) in the construction of theory. Her aim was to show the limitations of androcentric psychological research for an adequate understanding of the development of men as well as women.

### **Cognitive Developmental Theory**

This is a theory based on the work of a psychologist (Jean Piaget). It explains children's development of the mental categories formed through interaction with others.

### **Culture**

Culture refers to patterns of expectations, beliefs, values, ideas, and material objects that define the taken-for-granted way of life for a society or group. It can also be defined as shared and learned ways of life, (traditions, customs and so on) common to members of a society who have lived together for a long period of time.

It is the resume of life. Patriarchy is a culture of discrimination against women. Everything is usually defined within the context of men in a patriarchal society.

### **Feminism**

It is the belief and action based on diverse political theories and principles but advocating social changes intended to free women from oppressive social structures. It is also based on the idea that women's position in society is as a result of social not biological factors.

### **Feminist Theory**

Analyses explaining the position of women in society, intended to also provoke the possibilities for liberating social changes.

## **3.2 Gender**

Gender refers to the socially learned behaviours and expectations associated with men and women. The term gender has transcended its earlier 'grammatical based' usage of classifying nouns as male/female.

It is not used to describe the biological sexual characteristics by which we identify females and males but to encompass the socially defined sex roles, attitudes and values which communities and societies ascribe as appropriate for one sex or the other.

The term 'gender' directs our attention to all the attributes acquired in the process of socialization: our self and group definitions, our sense of appropriate roles, values and

behaviours and above all, expected and acceptable interactions in relationships between women and men.

### **Gender Division of Labour**

This is an overall societal pattern where women are allotted one set of gender roles and men are allotted another set. Unequal gender division of labour refers to a situation where there is an unequal gender division of reward.

Discrimination against women in this sense means that women get most of the burden of labour and most of the unpaid labour but men collect most of the income and reward resulting from the labour.

In many African countries, the most obvious pattern in the gender division of labour is that women are mostly confined to unpaid domestic work and unpaid food production while men dominate in cash crop production and wage employment.

### **Gender Equality**

This is a situation where there is no discrimination on grounds of a person's sex in the allocation of resources or benefits, or in the access to services. Gender equality may be measured in terms of whether there is equality of opportunity or equality of results.

### **Gender Identity**

It means definition of self, based on an understanding of what it means to be a woman or a man.

### **Gender Roles**

These are patterns of behavior in which women and men behave, based on the cultural expectations associated with their gender. Put differently, these are roles that are classified by sex, where their classification is social and not biological. For example, if child-rearing is classified as a female role, it is a female gender role, not a female sex role since child-rearing can be done by men or women.

### **Gender Socialization**

This is the process by which gender roles are learned.

- The situation where there is no discrimination on grounds of a person's sex in the allocation of resources or benefits, or in the access to services is called \_\_\_\_\_
- Gender Equality

### **Patriarchy**

Institutionalized power relationships that give men power over women. Generally, it can be defined as a general organizational feature of society which was initiated by men, continues to be maintained by men and has men as its primary beneficiaries.

The term arises from the traditional belief that men are the heads of their families and their wives are subordinate to them and also out of the traditional claim that women do not exist in their own rights but only in relationship to men either as mother, daughter, wife or mistress. The Yoruba society, for instance, is patriarchal in nature.

This is evident in the fact that the military, industry, political offices, universities, science, technology, finance, in short, all the corridors of power in the society are dominated and paraded by men.

Traditionally, the father has complete ownership over his wife or wives and children, including the power of physically abusing the woman. All these are granted by the institution of patriarchy.

## **Sex**

Sex is the biological identity of a person.

## **Sex Roles**

This is often contrasted with gender roles. It refers to the biological function for which a necessary qualification is to belong to one particular sex category. For example, pregnancy is a female sex role because only members of the female sex can bear children.

## **Sex/Gender System**

This is the social-structural arrangements in society that transform biological sex differences into socially meaningful sex and gender relationships.

## **Sexism**

It is the beliefs that see women as inferior and defend their traditionally subordinated place in the world.

## **Social Construction of Gender**

It is the process by which the expectations associated with being male and being female are passed on through society.

## **Social Learning Theory**

This is the theory of socialization emphasizing the significance of environment in explaining the socialization process.

## **Stereotypes**

Gender role stereotyping is the constant portrayal of women and men occupying social roles according to the traditional gender division of labour in a particular society. Such gender role stereotyping works to support and reinforce the traditional gender division of labour by portraying it as normal and natural.

## Summary of Study Session 3

In Study Session 3, you have learnt that:

1. Sex is the biological identity of a person, while Gender encompasses the socially defined sex roles, attitudes and values which communities and societies ascribe as appropriate for one sex or the other.
2. Patriarchy is a general organizational feature of society which was initiated by men, continues to be maintained by men and has men as its primary beneficiaries.
3. Sexism is the beliefs that see women as inferior and defend their traditionally subordinated place in the world

This study session attempted an extensive discussion of some of the concepts we make use of in gender discourse. These concepts include patriarchy, stereotypes, gender socialization, social learning theory and so on. It threw light on concepts that are closely related but easily confusing, concepts like gender and sex, sex and sexism and so on.

### Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

#### SAQ 3.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 3.1)

Write short notes on these concepts:

Stereotypes

Androcentrism

Gender Roles

Sex Roles

Patriarchy

#### SAQ 3.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 3.2)

Differentiate between Sex and Gender

## References

Margaret Anderson (1997), Thinking About Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender (U.S.A: Ally and Bacon).

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## Study Session 4: Gender Issues

### Introduction

In this study session, you will be taken through various factors that are responsible for the marginalization of women in many societies. These factors range from socio-cultural to psycho-analytical. They are factors that have led to the development of gender study.

This study session will expose you to the understanding of why, in the real sense of the word, women are described by many as the second sex and why in most cases, this description is mistaken.

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 4

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

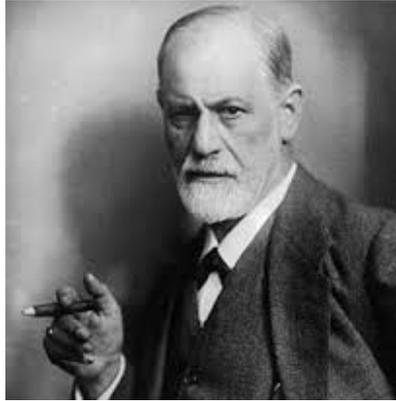
- 4.1 Explain the psychoanalytic factors responsible for the marginalization of women
- 4.2 Identify socio-cultural factors responsible for the negative conception about women
- 4.3 Discuss the political factors that contributed to the relegation of women
- 4.4 Highlight the economic factors responsible for the situation of women

#### 4.1 Psychoanalytic Factors

Psychoanalytic factors can be traced to **Freudian's theory** concerning sexuality. For him, gender is the product of sexual maturation and that because boys and girls experience their sexuality differently as a result of biology, they end up with contrasting gender roles.

If men adjust to their sexual maturation normally, Freud is of the view that they will end up displaying expected masculine traits. Similarly, if women develop normally, they will end up displaying expected feminine traits.

Freud's original ideas on sexual development appeared in '*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905)*'. In this work, the evolution of the male and female sexuality is presented as parallel processes.



**Figure 4.1:** Freud

**Source:**[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_7aCKBW\\_jNmg/SpTf2wcYFXI/AAAAAAAAAD0/tkgKL1oxh7o/s320/Sigmund+Freud.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_7aCKBW_jNmg/SpTf2wcYFXI/AAAAAAAAAD0/tkgKL1oxh7o/s320/Sigmund+Freud.jpg)

For males, this means that the original love and attachment for mothers during the first two stages of life develops into a ‘love triangle’ during the phallic stage.

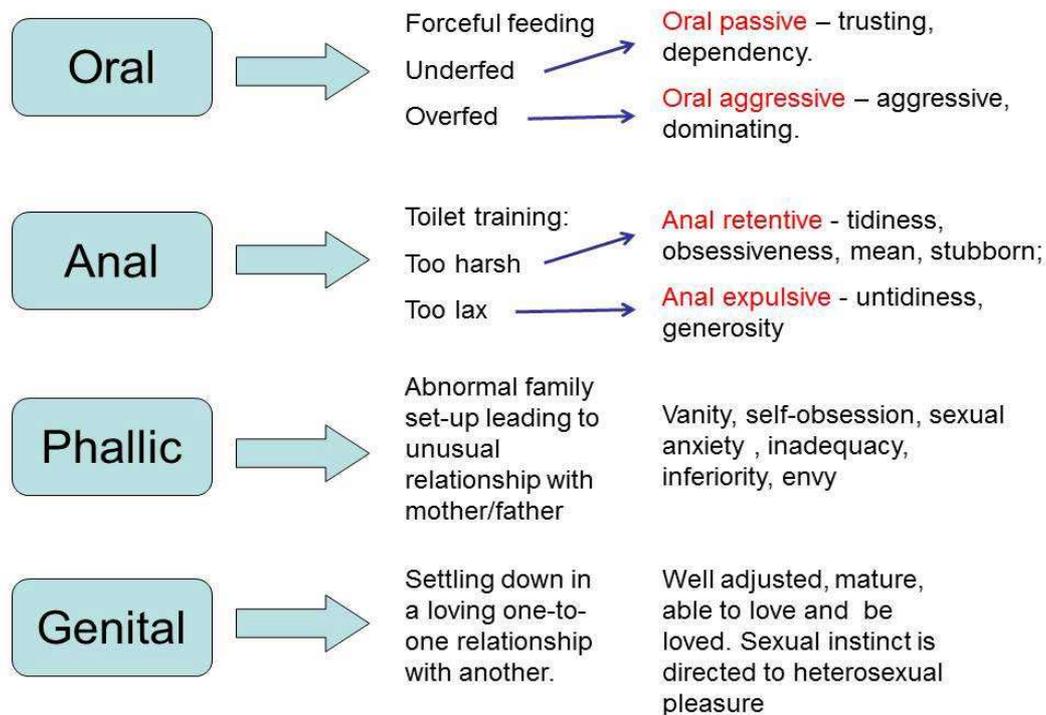
Now as the genitals become the primary area of libidinal gratification, the child’s attachment to the mother takes on sexual overtones while at the same time, the little boy’s father is viewed as dangerous (that is, bigger and more powerful).

The child’s anxiety over this state of affairs is exacerbated by the realization that women are castrated and that he too might be so punished if his father learns of his desires for his mother.

As a result of such fears, claimed Freud, the **Oedipus complex** is ‘smashed to bits’ when the male child gives up his libidinal attitudes toward his mother and seeks out his father as a source of identification.

One important consequence of the Oedipus complex is the development of a super-ego that leads to a strong sense of justice and morality in men.

However, Freud argues that the above oedipal drama was similar for the female. But in his later work, ‘Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes’, (1925), Freud proposed a different and more complicated evolution of female sexuality.



**Figure 4.2:** Freud's Theory of Sexuality

**Source:** <http://www.simplypsychology.org/freud-personality-stages.jpg>

According to him, pre-Oedipal girls, like Pre-Oedipal boys are strongly attached to their mothers. During the phallic stage, females find the major locus of libidinal gratification to be the clitoris (an inferior form of the penis) and their masturbation, therefore, takes on an active (that is, masculine) character.

- What is the consequence of the Oedipus complex in men?
- It results to the development of a super-ego that leads to a strong sense of justice and morality in men.

The Oedipus complex for the female involves a change in the direction of sexual attachment from the mother to the father and an abandonment of the clitoris for the vagina as the major auto-erotic zone.

The substitution of the vagina for the clitoris is considered to be essential for the establishment of a feminine (that is, passive) attitude.

Perhaps the major impetus for the significant changes in female sexuality during the phallic period is the girl's observation that they, as well as their mothers, do not have a penis. Freud believes that the female must learn to accept the 'fact of castration'.

But the desire for male genitalia leads to ‘envy for the penis’ and great anger and hostility towards the mother for not having one. The little girl’s incestuous feelings towards her father are provoked by the desire to obtain a penis through sexual relations with him.

It is also such penis envy that leads to the rejection of the inferior clitoris. Indeed, the Oedipus complex is only truly resolved when the female symbolically obtains a penis through the birth of a child, preferably a male.

Thus, the female personality, according to Sigmund Freud, is born out of envy, a sense of inferiority, a change from active to passive modes of sexual expression and the despair of castration.

Going by his claim, therefore, women were narcissistic as a compensation for their sexual deficiencies, as well as vain, frigid and underdeveloped with respect to their sense of morality.

#### 4.1.1 Defense of The Psychoanalytic Conceptions Of Women

A number of students of psychoanalytic theory have defended Freud’s original conception of female psycho-sexual development. Representative of those who have remained most faithful to Freud’s assumption that biology directs psychology is **Helen Deutsch** whose work on female sexuality appears in the ‘Psychology of Women (1944)’.



**Figure 4.3:** Helen Deutsch

**Source:**<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/images/pgillus/deutschyounger.jpg>

Deutsch emphasized that a full understanding of female sexuality must include a consideration of post Oedipal events, particularly menstruation, pregnancy, birth, and lactation. The core elements of the female personality, (Narcissism and passivity) stem primarily from the female anatomy and reproductive functions that direct her towards a passive mode of receptivity and waiting, and attract her to pain and suffering (masochism).

Failure to switch to the passive feminine mode of sexuality could lead to a conflict laden 'masculinity complex'. A significant extension of Freud's theory involved Deutsch's consideration of the importance of the anticipation and experience of motherhood.

Deutsch also recognized that the pre-Oedipal girl had a most significant and complex relationship with her mother that must be acknowledged in its own right.

**Erik Erikson** (1902) is also a psychoanalyst who has remained close to Freudian theory. He does acknowledge the role of culture and historical context in human development and, therefore, presents female development in a more sympathetic light.

The core of Erickson's theory is the negotiation of eight turning points (nuclear conflicts) throughout the course of development. The task before the individual is to seek a positive resolution to each of the successive development tasks.



**Figure 4.4:** Erik Erikson

**Source:** <http://jewishcurrents.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ErikH.Erikson.jpg>

The catalyst of his theory of female development was the observation of the play constructions of 10, 11, and 12-year-old boys and girls. Boys tended to build erect towers and buildings with elaborate cones and cylinders, and busy street scenes of animals and cars.

Girls constructed enclosed spaces that housed peaceful scenes and static figures. From such spatial representations, Erikson saw parallels to male and female genitalia and ways in which they influenced the experiences of biological and social roles.

According to Erikson, the essence of a woman's identity development involves her 'inner space', which matches the biological ground plan of womb and vagina and its reproductive potential.

Identity is centered on the anticipation and realization of motherhood, not the lack of the male organ as proposed by Freud.

Problems for women ensue when their potential for fulfillment of this 'inner space' is not met. In addition, women's psychological interpretation of the inner space leads to a unique constellation of personality characteristics such as warmth, tenderness, nurturance and compassion.

#### 4.1.2 Arguments against Freud

**Karen Horney** (1885-1952) and **Clara Thompson** (1893-1985) strongly disagreed with Freud. Horney emphasized that psychoanalytic theory presents development from a masculine point of view.

According to her, Freud's idea of penis envy, the masculine complex, female inferiority and masochism are not characteristics peculiar to women alone. She refuted in a similar vein, the contention that such traits are primarily of biological origin or are significant to female personality development.



**Figure 4.5:** Karen Horney

**Source:** <http://static.memrise.com/uploads/mems/output/3368169-130811202749.png>

Rather, such behaviours appear to be culturally related, particularly in cultures where women are denied opportunities to be creative and independent. Horney also objected to the idea that penis envy played a crucial role in female psycho-sexuality, pointing out that men can also manifest envy of the anatomical and reproductive function of the female.

Similarly, Thompson believed that cultural factors, in terms of whether they impede or promote the need for growth and competence, were more significant to human development than were biological factors.



**Figure 4.6:** Clara Thompson

**Source:** <http://www.feministvoices.com/assets/Women-Past/Thompson/Clara-Thompson.jpg>

Thus, women’s personalities were not as a result of their so-called biological inferiority, but rather due to the ascription of an inferior status to women in a patriarchal society. She reasoned for example that what women envied and desired was not the penis but the position of power and privilege attained by those who had one.

She did not deny that many women exhibited feelings of inferiority, a poorly developed super-ego, rigidity, or, in some cases, masculine behaviours. However, such behaviours were a cultural creation, not of biological origin.

While Freud claimed that such traits stemmed from a psychological interpretation of one’s biological structures (that is ‘anatomy is destiny’), Clara Thompson pointed to the inferior status of women in society, their dependency on men, and the goals of marriage and motherhood as the only pathways of achievement possible.

## 4.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

Male dominated culture, as all feminist have observed, defines masculinity and femininity as contrasting forms. In contemporary society, some of the terms used to define men and women are given in the table below:

**Table 4.1:** Terms used to define Men and Women in Contemporary Society

Men	Women
Active	Passive
Strong	Weak
Dominant	Submissive
Rational	Emotional

Catharine Mackinnon did a study on the level of participation of boys and girls in sports. According to her, girls have learnt a lot all these years on the sidelines, watching. They have been excluded from resources, participating in sports and consequently, women have learnt actual disability, enforced weakness and lack of spirit-body connection in being and in motion.

All these can be attributed to wrong ideas being held about women, illusions about women's weakness, and notions/stereotypes about femininity. All these have gone a long way in structuring women's psyche and rendering them not only invisible in the sense of being physically unable to participate in sports but also being unable to realize their potentials as able human beings.

To the extent that men and women conform to these definitions, they are bound to be alienated from each other, holding incompatible values and views of the world. To the extent that men dominate women, the sexes are bound to be alienated from each other for they have incompatible interests: men in maintaining their dominance and women in resisting it.

**Box 4.1: Catharine Mackinnon study on the level of participation of boys and girls in sports**

Girls have learnt a lot all these years on the sidelines, watching. They have been excluded from resources, participating in sports and consequently, women have learnt actual disability, enforced weakness and lack of spirit-body connection in being and in motion.

The concepts of femininity and masculinity force both men and women to overdevelop certain of their capacities at the expense of others. For instance, while men generally become excessively competitive with, and detached from others, women tend to become excessively altruistic.

### 4.3 Political Factors

Generally, many women are not allowed to be politically partisans. The problem that has informed their marginal role in the country's politics can be said to be the prejudice they face in any male dominated world.

In most cases, female political aspirants are regarded as threats, clogs in the wheel of progress, and first class enemies. They are labeled with names such as prostitutes, iron ladies, and most especially women who would not tolerate anything from their male counter-parts.

To pull them down, men adopt all sorts of intrigues, ranging from intimidation and harassment to manipulation and maneuver all in a bid to make the female aspirant lose an elective position.

Many political thinkers have argued that women are different from men and that their difference renders them not only incapable of civic virtue, but also that this makes them a threat to a well-ordered state.

In short, women are often seen as followers not rulers. It is as a result of this that **Margaret Schuler** advocates for justice. She argues that many injustices done to women are as a result of

the fact that women are unaware of their rights and the few who are aware do not know how to protect such rights.

#### 4.4 Economic Factors

Traditionally, the establishment of the monogamous family with the man as the head of the family and the economic provider gave men diverse economic power. In many important respects, a wife is reduced to a thing owned by her husband.

Her economic activities are controlled by her husband and her labour is seen as that which does not bring any income and, therefore, must be supported. While the man is remunerated according to his work, the women on the other hand are remunerated according to the will of her supporter.

The only economic aspect where women are seen as relatively economically powerful is in the area of consumption. Economically, therefore, women have been made dependent on men. Even domestic works which are classified as women's work are trivialized. If women are to work at all, they are always given the most boring and lowest paying jobs.

- What do you think is the origin of men's economic empowerment?
- The establishment of the monogamous family with the man as the head of the family and the economic provider.

In articulating the extent to which women have been economically disempowered, **Nancy Holmstrom** explains that although fewer women today are full time domestic workers than in the past, they tend to think of their primary work and role as that of a wife and mother.

Their role in the family helps to put them in an inferior economic position. Even the rare woman who has a non-traditional job but no family is still shaped by the social and cultural institution from which she is deviating.

In situations where women are allowed to work, they are often discriminated against by their employers and male colleagues. A sense of injustice is presupposed here.

## Summary of Study Session 4

In Study Session 4, you have learnt that:

1. Psychoanalytic factors can be traced to Freudian's theory concerning sexuality.
2. For him, gender is the product of sexual maturation and that because boys and girls experience their sexuality differently as a result of biology, they end up with contrasting gender roles.
3. According to Freud, pre-Oedipal girls, like Pre-Oedipal boys are strongly attached to their mothers.
4. During the phallic stage, females find the major locus of libidinal gratification to be the clitoris (an inferior form of the penis) and their masturbation, therefore, takes on an active (that is, masculine) character.
5. Male dominated culture, as all feminist have observed, defines masculinity and femininity as contrasting forms.
6. Generally, many women are not allowed to be politically partisans. The problem that has informed their marginal role in the country's politics can be said to be the prejudice they face in any male dominated world.
7. Traditionally, the establishment of the monogamous family with the man as the head of the family and the economic provider gave men diverse economic power. In many important respects, a wife is reduced to a thing owned by her husband

## Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

### SAQ 4.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 4.1)

Make a distinction between the socio-cultural and psychoanalytic account often alluded to in order to justify women's inferior position.

### SAQ 4.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 4.2)

Describe the Oedipus complex as explained by Freud in his psychoanalytic theory.

### SAQ 4.3 (Tests Learning Outcomes 4.3)

Attempt a defense of Freud's psycho-analytic theory as put forward by Deutsch and Erickson.

### SAQ 4.4 (Tests Learning Outcomes 4.4)

Critically examine the economic and political factors responsible for the discrimination against women.

Are the socio-cultural factors as a result of various traditional assumptions about women? Give reasons for your answer.

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## **Study Session 5: Basic Philosophical Assumptions as They Relate to Gender Issues**

### **Introduction**

It is a common practice to underestimate whatever is described as feminine in many disciplines. In Philosophy, in cases where some feminine characteristics are regarded as equal, some philosophers often use the term 'equal but different' from male ones.

They have, in practice usually been regarded as of secondary importance, less important than those deemed as male, and less worthy of being included in some ideals of human excellence.

In this study session, the views of some philosophers, particularly as they relate to gender issues shall be examined. This is to enable you have an insight into what the opinions of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Rousseau are about women.

### **Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5**

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Identify various assumptions underlying traditional ethical theories
- 5.2 Explain whether as a matter of fact, the views of the philosophers mentioned above are gendered or not.

### **5.1 Aristotle's Views about Women**

Much of Aristotle's philosophy is based on the assumption that everything which exists can be seen as existing for a reason or an end. To understand this end, the function of a thing must be identified, and its function resides in its nature, in that which distinguishes it from other things and makes it the sort of thing that it is.

Aristotle assumes that just as the individual parts of the human body has a function so also human beings have a function. This function has to do with developing their special talent or excellence and these can be discovered when we know what distinguishes human beings from other species.

What distinguishes human beings is their reason and as a result, he concludes that the functions of human beings involve exercising their non-corporeal faculties or 'soul' in accordance with a principle of reason. Consequently, one can then say that the distinguishing mark of human beings lies in their power of reasoning.



**Figure 5.1:** Aristotle

**Source:** <http://www.liberal-vision.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/aristotle.jpg>

However, according to Aristotle, there are certain classes of human beings who are excluded from the full exercise of human reason; these are slaves and women. Slaves, according to Aristotle, are piece of property; the life of a slave is simply a means to an end, that of enabling the master to pursue a life of freedom and virtue among other male citizens of the city state or polis.

Similarly, the life of a woman is functional; it is that of producing heirs, and like slaves, to play a part in providing the necessities of life. He expressed this by explaining that when we find women and slaves in any family or household, they exist for the sake of the polis.

- According to Aristotle, what is the distinguishing factor in Human beings?
- Their Power of Reasoning

It is an inferior but necessary form of association whose rationale lies in its provision of means through which males could live a life devoted to intellectual and political pursuits.

#### **5.1.1: The Problem with Aristotle's View of Women**

There is a problem with the exclusion of women and slave form the realm of those who can reason. After all, they are also human beings and the performance of their functions will require their reasoning faculties.

Aristotle realizes this problem himself when he explains that; about slaves, the first question to be asked is whether in addition to their virtues as tools or servants, they have another and more valuable one. Can they possess restraint, courage, justice and every other condition of that kind?

Or have they in fact nothing but the serviceable quality of their persons? The question may be answered in either of two ways, but both present a difficulty. If we say that slaves have these virtues, how then will they differ from free men?

If we say that slaves do not have them, the position is anomalous, since they are human beings and share in reason. Roughly the same question can be put in relation to women and children.

Aristotle would have argued that the type of knowledge possessed by women and slaves is of a special kind and not that the reasoning faculty is not present at all in slaves and is ineffective in females.

- What is the problem with Aristotle's view of women?
- Aristotle excluded women and slaves from the realm of those who can reason. But the fact is that they are also human beings and the performance of their functions will require their reasoning faculties.

Or that the knowledge and virtue of slaves and women consisted in knowing how to be ruled and how to perform their allotted task which, according to Aristotle, did not qualify as fully rational.

By implication, therefore, one can say that Aristotle's philosophy is based upon the idea that one class of human beings (males) should lead a life that he sees as self-justifying and another class (women and slaves) should lead a life that is a means towards achieving this.

As a result, he consistently refers to women in his political philosophy as defective, inferior beings, almost as a degenerated form of human life.

To sum Aristotle's view up, one can say that he sees women as inferior and deficient compared to men. But there is sometimes a tension between this and the fact that he also wants to see women and slaves as suited for the roles they play.

This tension is common in the history of philosophy. On the one hand, women are seen as inferior, as lacking rational capacities. On the other hand, women are seen as possessing their own virtues, or their own special forms of skill or excellence necessary for the female role.

#### **Box 5.1: Aristotle's view of women**

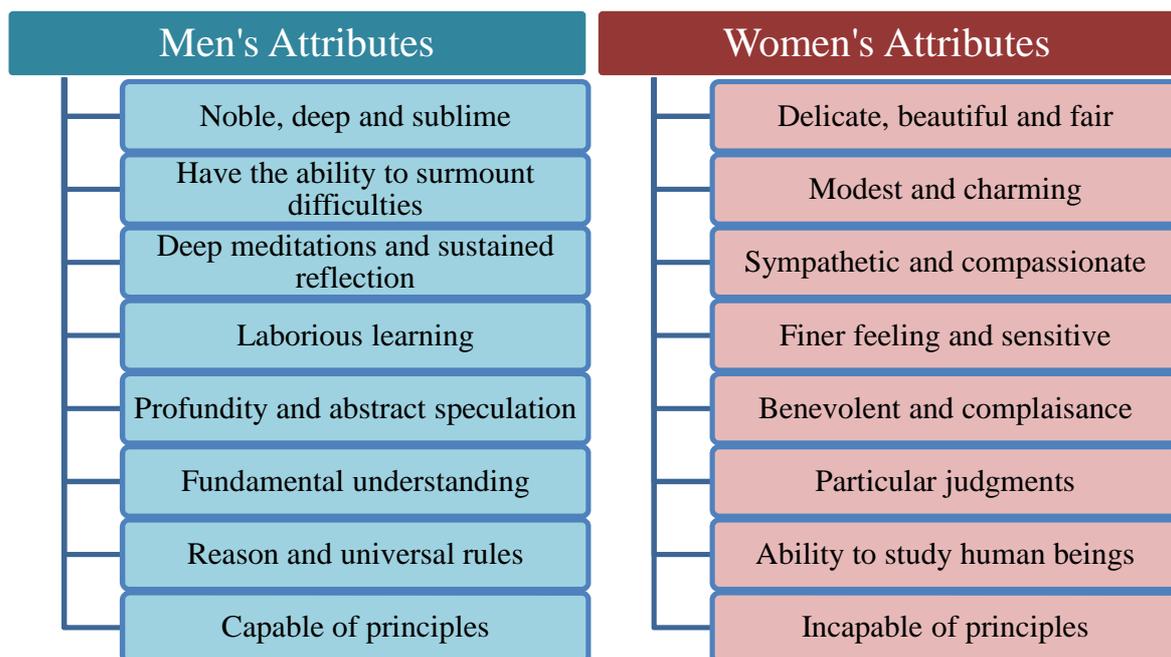
The life of a woman is functional; it is that of producing heirs, and like slaves, to play a part in providing the necessities of life. When women and slaves are found in any family or household, they exist for the sake of the polis. Women are seen as inferior and deficient.

One can, therefore, say that his political philosophy is gendered. Though this gendered view may not be explicit, it is sometimes implicit in the work of many philosophers just like we have in the case of **Immanuel Kant**.

## 5.2 Immanuel Kant

Kant wrote a paper 'Of the Distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime in the interrelations of the two sexes' where he makes a distinction between male and female characteristics and abilities.

According to him, some characteristics are peculiar to males, while some are peculiar to females, some of these are given in the figure below:



**Figure 5.2:** Kant's Characteristics of Men and Women

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

In his moral philosophy, Kant tries to answer the question 'what gives an action moral worth'? He saw the moral worth of an action as residing in the motive out of which the action was performed and he believed that only a certain sort of motive could qualify as truly moral. Also, he thought that the only truly moral actions are those that are performed out of duty.

There is a striking similarity between what he says about moral worth and what he characterizes as masculine. Unfortunately, there is lack of connection between the virtues he ascribes to females and what he describes as the highest form of character. Sympathy, feeling, sensitivity and compassion are all seen as irrelevant to the moral worth of an action.

However, for Immanuel Kant, to act out of duty necessarily involves acting out of principle. One of the main aims in his moral philosophy is to attempt to identify a universal principle which could serve as the cornerstone for all morally right actions.

The problem here is that he does not see females as capable of acting on principles. The conclusion, therefore, is that if women are incapable of acting on principles, then they are incapable of the highest form of virtue and, therefore, inferior to men.



**Figure 5.3:** Immanuel Kant

**Source:** [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cc/Kant\\_Portrait.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cc/Kant_Portrait.jpg)

The philosophies of Kant and Aristotle are ‘masculine’ in a way. This is because like Aristotle, Kant excludes women from a philosophical ideal, this time, that of moral worth. Offering a conclusive account of such exclusion.

**Jean Grimshaw** explains that: Aristotle overtly and explicitly excludes women and runs into difficulties in trying to make this exclusion coherent and justifiable. Kant’s exclusion is implicit; he does not even discuss the question of gender directly in his main writings on moral philosophy.

But in a way, Kant’s exclusion of women is less arbitrary than that of Aristotle. And the reason is that the ideal of moral worth itself encapsulates qualities seen as paradigmatically masculine and excludes those seen as feminine.

A conception or ideal of what it is to be masculine is written into a philosophical theory or ideal. Aristotle and Immanuel Kant are not the only philosophers whose views are negative about women. John Locke is another example.

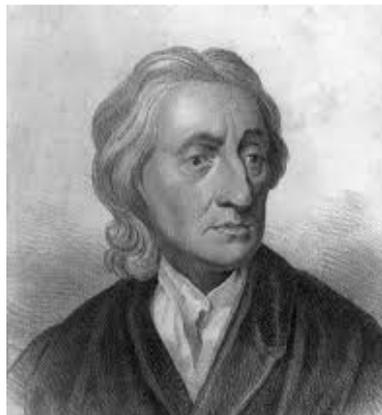
- Why are the philosophies of Kant and Aristotle regarded as ‘masculine’?
- This is because like Aristotle, Kant excludes women from a philosophical ideal (moral worth).

### 5.3 John Locke

John Locke made various assumptions about women. He assumes for instance that there is natural inequality between the sexes and a natural authority of husband over wife. Natural here implies that which is assumed to be given, a fact of nature and not amenable to any change.

Throwing more light on this, **Grimshaw** explains that **Locke** sees the dependence of women on men and the authority of men over women as arising from the fact that women have the role of childbearing. He sees this role as necessarily generating female economic dependence on men and lack of autonomy with respect to the right to control property.

Locke's discussion of women is primarily based on the assumption that women will marry and have children and their reproductive and marital roles are the only important aspect of their lives that needs discussion.



**Figure 5.4:** John Locke

**Source:** <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fa/Locke-John-LOC.jpg>

In his political philosophy, he attempts to establish the fact that citizens have rights that can be exercised against the arbitrary powers of absolute monarchs or tyrants who thought they could dispose the lives and property of their subjects at will.

His main concern was with the issue of property ownership. For him, what gave a man (only men in this regard) the right to appropriation and to property was the fact that he had contributed by his labour to the product.

His concern was to defend the exclusive right to hold on or to dispose of the property that men have whenever they so desire, especially to their respective heirs. The 'natural rights' that Locke

defended include the right to life, liberty and property; the property was to be under the individual control of male heads of families.

- Give one of the assumptions of John Locke
- He assumes that there is natural inequality between the sexes and a natural authority of husband over wife.

On a contrary view, women do not have the right to dispose of their property like men going by Locke's position. Similarly, the theory that the contribution to labour generates the right to appropriation is applicable to women.

The right of appropriation is only a male right; women have very limited rights over whatever property they bring into their marriage. In fact, they are not to have any legal say in the disposition of any of their products or that of their husband during their marriage.

There is no doubt that Locke's argument in support of the rights of men to own property further subordinates women and put them in dependent positions. One can, therefore, conclude that Locke's position is not accidental, he actually intends his political philosophy to achieve the position he has put forward.

However, there are some philosophers whose viewpoints are not completely masculine, for example Plato.

A philosopher's viewpoint is masculine according to Jean Grimshaw, if any of these three obtains.

- First, if the position of the philosopher excludes women explicitly or implicitly.
- Second, if the philosopher's philosophical ideals and theories encapsulate ideals of masculinity.
- Third, if the view the philosopher has about women is integral to the rest of his work. That is, the theories put forward by him are premised on a belief in the dependence and subordination of women and is incompatible with seeing women as equal to men.

Interestingly, Plato's position falls in between these three categories. His views tend towards subordinating women and at the same time, achieving equality of both sexes.

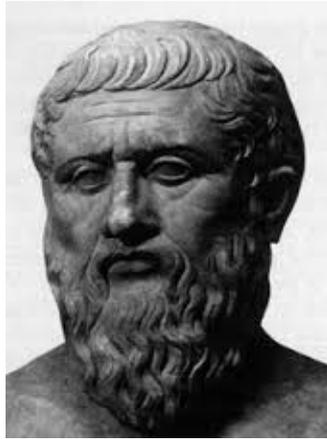
## 5.4 Plato

In his early works, (book five of *The Republic*), Plato, lays down the condition for the training of the guardians, his elite leadership group. He proposes that women should have the same opportunity as men to be trained as guardians.

In support of this position, he offers a strong statement against making sex differences the basis for discrimination. According to him:

If the difference between men and women consist only in women bearing and men begetting children, this does not amount to proof that a women differs from a man in respect to the sort of education she should receive; and we shall therefore continue to maintain that our guardians and their wives ought to have the same pursuits.

In the above quotation, Plato is proposing the same education for boys and girls freeing women form housework and child-care as all that they can and must always be engaged in. With such education, there will be a gradual change in the condition of women just like we have the extended family system gradually fading out in most parts of the world.



**Figure 5.5:** Plato

**Source:** <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/pics/Plato.jpg>

Contrary to Aristotle's position on slaves and women, Plato proposed the abolition of private life among the ruling class of his ideal state because of his fears of how this might disrupt the unity and harmony of the state. But towards the end of the *Timaeus*, Plato discusses the origin of women:

A brief mention may be made of the generation of other animals, so far as the subject admits of brevity; in this manner our argument will best attain a due proportion. On the subject of animals, then, the following remarks may be offered.

Of the men who came into the world, those who were cowards or led unrighteous lives may, with reason, be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation.

One can say, contrary to Plato's views in the *Timeaus*, that his earlier work, *The Republic* is considerably more egalitarian because in the above quotation, he can be interpreted as saying that women are the reincarnations of unworthy or criminal men.

*The Republic* clearly states that females must receive the same training as males and does not place limitations on how high a woman can rise within society. Nonetheless, Socrates concludes:

There is, therefore, no administrative occupation which is peculiar to woman as woman or man as man; natural capacities are similarly distributed in each sex, and it is natural for women to take part in all occupations as well as men, though in all, women will be the weaker partners.

The Republic is egalitarian inasmuch as it argues that women shouldn't be excluded from education or any other opportunities that men are provided with. Plato is as a matter of fact, concerned with differences between the souls of men and women (the metaphysical differences) and considers the physical differences to be minimal.

Thus, despite their equal 'natural capacities' women will still perform less well than men. This view is explicit once more in *The Laws*, when he writes of

"... that part of the human race which is by nature prone to secrecy and stealth on account of their weakness—I mean the female sex—has been left without regulation by the legislator, which is a great mistake."

## **5.5 Rousseau's View on Equality of the Sexes**

The idea of contrasting and complementary psychologies began during the time of Rousseau. Rousseau displayed an intense and passionate interest in the psychology of men and women, and in the emotional relationships between them.

He saw relationships between the sexes as the source of the most profound human joy and the deepest human feelings. Like many philosophers after him, his views about sexual relationships was based on a view of complementing male and female qualities, and on an intense interest in trying to understand what these qualities are.

Rousseau's philosophy is against any form of dependence which according to her, may lead to servitude and inequality. She highlights the "novel" idea that men and women should be educated together by stressing that people should 'give, without scruples, a woman's education to women, see to it that they love the cares of their sex, that they possess modesty, and that they know how to grow old in their career and keep busy in their house."

Rousseau further explained that "the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore."

Rousseau describes his passionate feelings for several women in his life due to the experience he had as a boy when a woman punished him. 'Who would have believed that the chastisement I received at eight from a thirty-year-old woman would have determined my tastes, desires, and passions for the rest of my life?'

Because of her support, Rousseau was able to take part in knowledgeable conversations, philosophical discussions, and intellectual pursuits. In fact, he was once advised that since musicians and servants will not sing together with him, he should change his tactics, and try the women.

He took this advice and made the acquaintance of several intelligent and influential women.

The above is not to say that Rousseau completely says positive things about women for there are a number of negative things he also said about them.

For instance he viewed women's options as entirely limited to the roles of wife and mother. What need would there be to allow her to determine for herself when nature had already physiologically dictated her destiny?

He demanded a reversion to primitivism in the education of women, offering minimal vocational training while insisting on her inability to reason and her inferiority to man. "A woman's education must be planned in relation to man".[S]he will always be in subjection to a man" and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his."

Contrastively, Mary Wollstonescraft advocates better education for women. In Chapter V of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, she attacks several writers, especially Rousseau, who had written poor accounts of women.

Wollstonecraft cites and comments on long passages from *Emile*. She is not unaware of Rousseau's relationships with women. Getting to the heart of Rousseau's error, she explains that:

Men have superior strength of body, but were it not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire sufficient to enable them to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence". Let us then, by being allowed to take the same exercise as boys, not only during infancy, but youth, arrive at perfection of boys, that we may know how far the natural superiority of man extends.

She cautions that she has no desire to breed a generation of independent and unattached women like herself, but that she seeks to develop wiser and more virtuous mothers. Without stressing independence she believes that once women gain intellectual equality, they should be given political and economic equality as well.

What is so radical about Wollstonecraft's idea is that girls are not educated relative to boys, but with them. She states:

If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfill the peculiar duties of their sex".

Nay, marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses.

After the age of nine, girls and boys intended for domestic employments or mechanical trades will be moved to other schools.

The two sexes will still study together in the mornings, and in the afternoons girls will learn millinery, mantua-making, and other fitting pursuits. Girls and boys still together? I hear some readers ask: yes. And I should not fear any other consequence than that some early attachment might take place".

## Summary of Study Session 5

This study session has attempted a critical discussion of the views of some philosophers as they relate to women. We examined the views of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Locke and Rousseau. We discovered that some philosophers have negative views about women while some have positive views. We also show that in Philosophy, these views are not accidental; in fact they are reflections of the thoughts of these various philosophers during the period of time in which they live.

In Study Session 5, you have learnt that:

1. According to Aristotle, there are certain classes of human beings who are excluded from the full exercise of human reason; these are slaves and women. Slaves, according to Aristotle, are piece of property; the life of a slave is simply a means to an end, that of enabling the master to pursue a life of freedom and virtue among other male citizens of the city state or polis.

Similarly, the life of a woman is functional; it is that of producing heirs, and like slaves, to play a part in providing the necessities of life. He expressed this by explaining that when we find women and slaves in any family or household, they exist for the sake of the polis.

2. Kant tries to answer the question 'what gives an action moral worth'? He saw the moral worth of an action as residing in the motive out of which the action was performed and he believed that only a certain sort of motive could qualify as truly moral. Also, he thought that the only truly moral actions are those that are performed out of duty.
3. John Locke made various assumptions about women. He assumes for instance that there is natural inequality between the sexes and a natural authority of husband over wife. Natural here implies that which is assumed to be given, a fact of nature and not amenable to any change.
4. Plato proposes that women should have the same opportunity as men to be trained as guardians.  
According to him, if the difference between men and women consist only in women bearing and men begetting children, this does not amount to proof that a women differs from a man in respect to the sort of education she should receive; and we shall therefore continue to maintain that our guardians and their wives ought to have the same pursuits.
5. The idea of contrasting and complementary psychologies began during the time of Rousseau. Rousseau displayed an intense and passionate interest in the psychology of men and women, and in the emotional relationships between them.

Rousseau's philosophy is against any form of dependence which according to her, may lead to servitude and inequality. She highlights the "novel" idea that men and women should be educated together by stressing that people should 'give, without scruples, a woman's education to women, see to it that they love the cares of their sex, that they possess modesty, and that they know how to grow old in their career and keep busy in their house."

### **Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 5**

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

#### **SAQ 5.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 5.1)**

To what extent can we describe Rousseau's position as a true reflection of how women are to be regarded in the society?

#### **SAQ 5.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 5.2)**

Did Rousseau draw from some aspects of Plato's Philosophy? Give reasons for your answer.

#### **SAQ 5.3 (Tests Learning Outcomes 5.3)**

Attempt a critical discussion of any two positions that are contrary to the position held by Rousseau.

### **References**

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17. Ibid.,

## Study Session 6

## Gender and Ethics

### Introduction

In this study session, you will learn about the implications of various dichotomies in gender discourse for ethics. Here you would be engaged in a thorough-going debate about whether there is in fact what we can describe as a female or male ethics.

Your focus will be on Immanuel Kant's ethical theory which is one of the major traditional ethical theories that met with feminists' dissatisfaction. Their argument is that Kant's ethical philosophy comprises of various implicit masculine assumptions. To what extent is this claim a true reflection of the views of Immanuel Kant in his moral Philosophy?

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 Explain critically examine Kant's ethical theory and the extent to which his ethical theory is masculine or feminine
- 6.2 Differentiate between the features of care ethics and ethics of justice.

#### 6.1 Kant's Moral Philosophy

Kant's moral Philosophy was designed to answer the following two questions:

- What is a moral action, as contrasted with a non-moral one?
- What is the difference between a person who acts morally and one who does not?

In an attempt to answer these questions, he distinguished between acts done from a **sense of duty** and those done from **inclination** in his Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals.

According to him, an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for the practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.



**Figure 6.1:** Kant

**Source:** <http://www.the-philosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/immanuel-kant-2.jpg>

From this position, it is quite obvious that Kant distinguishes between moral actions done solely for the sake of duty and actions done from inclinations and feelings. Also, Kant can be interpreted as saying that the moral worth of an action depends on the motive of duty and doing one's duty is doing something one is not willing to do but what one ought to do out of respect for the law.

That is, according to **Popkin** and **Strum**, that the agent realizes that an obligation exists and he/she must fulfill it.

Kant will be strongly in disagreement with any claim which holds that in matters of morality one should act upon one's inclinations or that a person should do that act which pleases him/her.

#### **Box 6.1: Distinguishing acts of Duty from acts of Inclination according to Kant**

According to Kant, an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for the practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.

The question one should then ask is 'what type of result is an action devoid of feelings, desires and inclinations expected to produce?' It appears, however, that there is always an element of feeling in all our actions otherwise Kant's ethics will be viewed as inhuman and unnatural.

- Kant distinguished between acts done from a sense of \_\_\_\_\_ and those done from \_\_\_\_\_ in his 'Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals'.
- Duty and Inclination

Kant's stern preaching of the claims of duty thus aroused in feminists a feeling of dissatisfaction. In my view, Kant expected this and as a result he relaxes his position when discussing the transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals.

As translated by **Thomas Kingsmill Abbot**, Kant explains that ‘an attention to the experiences of men’s conduct will be met with the realization and just complaints of the difficulty of finding a single example of the disposition to act from pure duty.

He continues by claiming that ‘although many things are done in conformity with what duty prescribes, it is nevertheless always doubtful whether they are done from duty so as to have a moral worth’.

Kant acknowledges the fact that it is difficult to find a pure motive of duty in an action. He tries to buttress this by claiming that ‘in fact, it is absolutely impossible to make out by experience and with complete certainty, a single case in which the maxim of an action however right in itself, rested simply on moral grounds and on the conception of duty.

From the foregoing, Kant can be criticized for saying so many things and nothing in particular. He did not stop at his stern preachment of duty but goes on to explain that since human beings are rational creatures, they ought to behave in a rational way.

#### **Box 6.2: Kant’s Philosophy**

The moral worth of an action depends on the motive of duty and doing one’s duty is doing something one is not willing to do but what one ought to do out of respect for the law.

This for Kant implies that one ought always to behave as if one’s action were to become a universal law. To this effect, Kant invented a phrase, ‘the categorical imperative’ which explains that one should act only on that maxim whereby thou can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.

- Kant’s stern preachment of the claims of duty aroused in feminists a feeling of  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Dissatisfaction

How then is the categorical imperative possible? The question can be rephrased as: how possible is it for one’s action to be adopted as a universal law? Kant’s view on universalization can be explained as meaning that one should act consistently and impartially.

However, Kant might be urging too strong a claim when he insists that we should never tell lies or that we should never break promises.

Generally, it stands to reason that we ought always to tell the truth but there are situations where one feels morally obliged to lie. For example, if an armed robber came looking for a friend, can a person tell the truth merely because one is following the categorical imperative?

Also, as noted by **Strum and Popkin**, Kantian ethics does not handle cases where we have conflict of duties. Suppose I promise to keep a secret and someone else ask me about it. I cannot both tell the truth and keep my promise.

Yet according to the Kantian position I should do both. In such a situation I cannot logically universalize my behaviour; if I tell the truth I will break my promise to keep the secret. If I keep my promise, I will not tell the truth.

Kant is, however, aware of the difficulty of forming a general principle applying to every situation and to all persons because some will comply, while others will find such principle too strict to comply with.

This is enough to nullify the whole essence of forming such a principle. He says: ‘in the case of this categorical imperative or law of morality, the difficulty (of discerning its possibility) is a very profound one’.

#### **Box 6.3: Kant’s view on universalization**

Kant’s view on universalization can be said to mean that one should act consistently and impartially.

Furthermore, **Pelegrinis** explains that to regard the universalizability thesis as a logical principle is to regard it as equivalent in meaning to ‘we ought to be impartial in our judgments’. The impartiality maxim prohibits making exceptions in our case or in the case of our friends. This is where feminists strongly disagree with Kant.

Feminists, especially Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, are interested in seeing morality attending to a particular situation and not to be seen as applying universal principles. This, I believe, was how the notions of ‘justice’ and ‘care’ were developed.

Universality does not only involve impartiality, it also involves acting consistently according to principles which are what ‘justice’ aims at. Care ethics on the other hand, aims at preserving and improving upon on-going relationships.

The earlier-mentioned feminists reject Kant’s universality thesis on the basis of its inconsistency and impartiality, concepts that are central to the justice orientation. Justice or duty ethics responds to all those who share our common humanity while the care perspective gives care and maintain connection with others.

This is not to say that there are some feminists who would reject consistency and impartiality as essential elements of the actions of persons; but their claim is that since consistency and impartiality are what justice aims at, in the process of discharging justice one becomes detached

and separated from the problems of the individuals with whom one is deliberating since one is dealing with everyone in the same way.

#### **Box 6.4: Universality, Care and Ethics**

Universality does not only involve impartiality, it also involves acting consistently according to principles which are what 'justice' aims at. Care ethics on the other hand, aims at preserving and improving upon on-going relationships.

Feminists do not only believe in apprehending the realities of the problems of such individuals, but also stress the need to become involved and connected with such people.

Having examined Kant's ethical theory, it is also imperative to analyze feminists' charge against this theory.

### **6.2 The Feminists' Charge against Kant**

Kant's emphasis on the universalization of moral actions and acting from a sense of duty unhindered by emotion aroused the dissatisfaction of feminists like Carol Gilligan, Iris Murdoch and Nel Noddings.

According to these feminists, instead of talking about universalizing our moral actions as Kant claims, (that is, that individuals should act in the same way in similar circumstances to all persons), we should be concerned with particular individuals.

Universalizing moral actions for these feminists implies not only consistency in an individual's action, but that everyone is also expected to act in the same way in similar circumstances. In this sense, individuals are impartially and consistently responded to in the same way not minding the nature of their moral problems.

**Blum**, whose work is a major challenge to Kant's ethical theory, explains that the notions of universal principle, duty, obligation, absence of emotions and strength of will, as used in Kant's ethical theory, are much more suited to the activities of men outside the home than they are to the activities of women in the home and family.

In short, the notions of duty and obligation as highlighted by Blum applies more to the tasks and responsibilities of the middle class male bureaucrat, manager or professional and less to those of the wife and mother.

This he says is so in two ways. First, emotion plays a major part in the performance of women's responsibilities as wives and mothers. This can be seen in the care of children which involves not only feeding but other emotional activities like nurturance, care, love and so on. The wife is responsible only to those to whom she is emotionally related.

This is not the case with the bureaucrat or manager whose duty or obligation is to provide services and to adhere to certain procedures. His job has nothing to do with being emotionally connected to those he comes in contact with; emotion is in fact discouraged as being likely either to distort the application of impartial procedures or cloud thought regarding the situation at hand, or even to interfere with the provision of the service in question.

Another related difference between female and male responsibilities is that the mother's responsibility to her husband and children is open-ended in nature compared to the more definite, specific and clearly defined responsibilities of the male. This seems to be Blum's reason for saying that the notions of duty and obligation are more appropriate to men than to women.

It is important to note that Blum's aim is to consider Kant's discussion of women by making reference to the fact that he views women as inferior to men in ways relevant to morality. Kant did not only rule out emotion as playing significant roles in his moral theory, he also gives reasons for doing this.

These reasons are based on arguments such as emotions are not reliable as a moral motive; that the qualities of emotions do not have their basis in rational principles; that since emotions lie outside the scope of our will, they cannot have any effect on us morally; that emotionally-based actions can never involve the universality necessary for morality; that emotions are a form of inclination and, as such, involve being self-centered.

Rather than stressing that we should act from a sense of duty unhindered by emotion as Kant claims, feminists are of the opinion that acting in this way is rather inhuman because it implies acting out of respect for the law even if we do not want to act the way we have acted.

Feminists are interested in acting because we want to act out of concern for others, not because there is an obligation which one must fulfill. In fact, their position is that one should act because one cares about the welfare of others which is against Kant's claim that one should act from a sense of duty, unhindered by any feeling of inclination toward others.

This view about caring for others has led to what feminists termed the 'ethic of care'. Since the ethic of care is concerned with the welfare of others, the underlying premise of this framework is that individuals are connected to one another rather than being separated like the 'ethic of justice' perspective.

Also, contrary to the claim that we should universalize our moral actions and act in exactly the same way in similar circumstances, feminists stress the importance of being concerned with particular actions of specific individuals. For them, universalizing moral actions involve being consistent and impartial and since consistency and impartiality are concepts that justice is concerned with, this has led to the development of the term 'ethic of justice'.

Traditionally, justice involves being fair to all in the same way by virtue of the rights individuals possess. This is why the ethics of justice is sometimes called the ethic of rights. In trying to be

fair to all in the same way, the ethic of justice separates individuals rather than connect them with one another.

This is done by respecting and not interfering with the rights of these individuals. It is, however, imperative at this point to examine the whole idea of 'ethic of care' and 'ethic of justice'.

### 6.3 Feminist Ethics/Care Ethics

Feminists may be understood as saying that concepts such as duty, obligation and universalization as used in Kant's ethical theory play little role in ethics. We have the whole area of personal and interpersonal relations and activities which according to Nel Noddings is what the ethic of care is about.

Noddings' explanation concerning 'ethic of care' is that morality is rooted not only in human relations in general but also in the caring relation in particular. This ethic is also rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness.



**Figure 6.7:** Nel Noddings

**Source:** <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/mssc/Downloads/Noddings.gif>

Receptivity according to Noddings is the ability of the one caring to receive the other. In apprehending the reality of the other, Noddings is understood to mean seeing the other person's life, situation, needs, interests, and so on as that person sees it without imposing personal judgments upon what one sees.

Apprehending the reality of the other makes one act on behalf of such a person as if one were acting on behalf of oneself.

Concerning relatedness, Noddings singles out a certain sort of caring relation as ethically significant by rooting morality in human relatedness. What is ethically ideal, according to her, is to create, maintain and enhance this caring relation to become and to aid others in becoming the sort of individuals which can partake in relations that have to do with ethical caring.

In short, any relation that reflects caring as one understands her is ethical. In order for the caring of the one caring to be complete, the cared-for must respond in the appropriate manner to the one caring.

What then happens if the cared-for fails to respond in the appropriate manner? This may render the ethical relation incomplete and as Leslie Wilson has explained, an absence of an appropriate response on the part of the cared-for may nullify the ethicality of the caring relation.

Nel Noddings is trying to shift the perspective of moral theory away from applying rules and principles in solving moral problems to caring for particular individuals. It is a mistake, she claims, 'to suppose that ethics is necessarily a subject that must be cast in the language of principles and rules'.

In the view of Carol Gilligan, the application of principles and rules to solve moral problems and caring for individuals with moral problems are two different but valid ways of solving moral problems.



**Figure 6.7:** Carol Gilligan

**Source:**[http://jwa.org/sites/jwa.org/files/styles/scale\\_width\\_300px/public/mediaobjects/Gilligan-Carol.jpg?itok=FcR8Q](http://jwa.org/sites/jwa.org/files/styles/scale_width_300px/public/mediaobjects/Gilligan-Carol.jpg?itok=FcR8Q)

In an extract from her work, Gilligan explains that women have a very different conception of morality, a morality of responsibility while men have a morality of rights. This difference, Gilligan argues arises from our different gender formation. In short, according to her, gender socialization produces two different notions of morality.

Very early in life, men's individualism and separation from people teaches them ethic of justice, while women's affiliation to mother's and others teaches them an ethic of care. The moral imperative that emerges, according to her, in repeated interviews with women is an injunction to care.

For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to avoid interfering with the rights to life and self-fulfillment.

Taking a look at what ethic of care is about, one may want to ask the question: would this idea of caring for others not further enhance the oppression which women suffer since women are socially defined and seen as nurturers and carers? I do not think so.

Women's particularistic caring nature results from the fact that right from their childhood, women were not only prevented from developing a sense of their own they were also denied the opportunity of fully developing their rational capacities.

The idea that ethic of care is trying to portray is that women's moral experiences should not be considered as inferior and that men also experience this caring relation too.

Feminists, represented by Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan and Iris Murdoch are out to emphasize that women experience moral problems in ways different from that of men and that one should not be considered inferior to the other or seen as lacking moral worth compared to the other; they are only claiming a difference not superiority.

In fact, their position is that in social life, two assumptions are central in order to ensure peaceful co-existence among individuals in any society. These are mutual interdependence in relationships and the role of emotions in our daily activities.



**Figure 6.8:** Iris Murdoch

**Source:** <http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2012/9/6/1346925612499/Iris-Murdoch-008.jpg>

### **6.3.1: Mutual interdependence in relationships**

In many human relationships, you will discover that just as we have rich people so also do we have poor ones. There are also vulnerable, dependent, ill and frail people. In cases like this, the desirable moral response is attentiveness to the needs of these people not detached respect for their rights.

Feeling for these people and being immersed in the other person establish vital aspects of the moral relationship. In essence, the care perspective focuses on responsibilities and forms of empathy that a right-based account may ignore in the attempt to protect persons from invasion by others.

### 6.3.2: The roles of emotion in daily life

Contrary to traditional ethics that regards theory and moral judgment as the affairs of reason, rather than of emotion and passion, care ethics emphasizes the positive roles of emotion in moral life.

Having a certain emotional attitude and expressing the appropriate emotion in action are morally relevant factors just as having the appropriate motive for an action is morally relevant. The person who acts from rule-governed obligations without appropriately aligned feelings such as concern when a friend suffers, seems morally deficient.

In addition to expressing their feelings in their responses, agents also need to attend to the feelings of persons toward whom. Insight into the needs of others and considerate attentiveness to their circumstances often come from the emotions more than reason

### Summary of Study Session 6

In Study Session 6, you have learnt that:

1. According to Kant, an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination and with every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for the practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations.
2. Kant acknowledges the fact that it is difficult to find a pure motive of duty in an action. He tries to buttress this by claiming that 'in fact, it is absolutely impossible to make out by experience and with complete certainty, a single case in which the maxim of an action however right in itself, rested simply on moral grounds and on the conception of duty.
3. Kant's emphasis on the universalization of moral actions and acting from a sense of duty unhindered by emotion aroused the dissatisfaction of feminists like Carol Gilligan, Iris Murdoch and Nel Noddings.
4. Universalizing moral actions for these feminists implies not only consistency in an individual's action, but that everyone is also expected to act in the same way in similar circumstances
5. Noddings' explanation concerning 'ethic of care' is that morality is rooted not only in human relations in general but also in the caring relation in particular. This ethic is also rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness

## Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

### SAQ 6.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 6.1)

Critically examine feminist charge against Kant. Can we say that traditional epistemology is guilty of this charge? Provide reasons for your answer.

### SAQ 6.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 6.2)

Which of the two ethical orientations do you prefer? Give reasons for your answer.

Highlight and briefly explain the two major assumptions that are likely to ensure peaceful co-existence among human beings in everyday life.

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## Study Session 7: Gender and Epistemology

### Introduction

In the previous study session, gender and ethics were examined. You discovered that there are two different but valid ethical orientations, which are: Ethics of care and the Justice orientation.

In this study session, feminist epistemology shall be examined as an aspect of epistemology that has implications for gender discourse.

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 7

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 Make a distinction between traditional epistemology and feminist epistemology.
- 7.2 Discuss the issues involved in feminist epistemology.
- 7.3 State the essential arguments in feminist epistemological discourse.

#### 7.1 The Idea of Feminist Epistemology

Feminist epistemology has often been understood as a branch of social epistemology that studies the various influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences on the production of knowledge.

Put in another way, feminist epistemology is about the ways gender influences what we take to be knowledge. Consider for example theoretical and scientific knowledge, the kind of knowledge privileged in the academy.

Western societies give the impression that this kind of knowledge is masculine. Theoretical knowledge is often tailored to the needs of mostly male managers, bureaucrats and officials exercising power in their given capacities.

Feminist epistemologists suggest that various kinds of practical know-how and personal knowledge (knowledge that bears the mark of the knower's biography and identity) such as the kinds of non-theoretical knowledge that mothers have of their children are undervalued when they are labeled feminine.

#### **Box 7.1: Feminist Epistemology**

Feminist Epistemology is a branch of social epistemology that studies the various influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences on the production of knowledge. It is about the ways gender influences what we take to be knowledge.

Given the androcentric need to represent the ‘masculine’ as independent of the ‘feminine’, this labeling has led to a failure to use non theoretical knowledge effectively in theoretical reasoning.

Traditional epistemologists find these claims of feminist epistemologists highly disturbing if not plainly absurd. Feminists’ epistemologists such as **Sandra Harding** (1986) and **Jane Flax** (1989) have rejected empiricism or even traditional epistemology as a whole for its seeming inability to comprehend these claims.



**Figure 7.1:** Sandra Harding

**Source:**[http://www.csw.ucla.edu/about/directors-1/director-images2/sandra-harding-images/big\\_s\\_harding.jpg/image\\_preview](http://www.csw.ucla.edu/about/directors-1/director-images2/sandra-harding-images/big_s_harding.jpg/image_preview)

Feminist epistemology as a form of social epistemology aims at incorporating the experiences of women within the epistemological framework. It offers ways of better understanding and evaluating female experience. It is motivated by the recognition that everyone who knows something is a person occupying a position in one or more social groups.

This in turn makes the social location of the knowing subject relevant for epistemic evaluation of the subject’s beliefs.

The project of feminist epistemology also aims at explaining the achievements of feminist criticism of science which is devoted to revealing sexism and androcentrism in theoretical inquiry.

- One of the aims of Feminist Epistemology is \_\_\_\_\_?
- Incorporating the experiences of women within the epistemological framework.

An adequate feminist epistemology must explain what it is for a scientific inquiry or practice to be sexist and androcentric; how these features are expressed in theoretical inquiry and in the application of theoretical knowledge and what bearing these features have on evaluating research.

Finally, feminist epistemology aims to defend feminist scientific practices which incorporate a commitment to the liberation of women and the social and political equality of all persons.

All adequate feminist epistemology must explain how research projects with such moral and political commitments can produce knowledge that meets such epistemic standards as empirical adequacy and fruitfulness.

### Box 7.2 Objectives of Feminist Epistemology

- Incorporating the experiences of women within the epistemological framework
- Explaining the achievements of feminist criticism of science which is devoted to revealing sexism and androcentrism in theoretical inquiry.
- Defending feminist scientific practices which incorporate a commitment to the liberation of women and the social and political equality of all persons.

Current developments in feminist epistemology stem from the recognition that knowledge is socially constructed and, therefore, must be seen in the context of the social relations in which its production occurs.

Recognition of the socially constructed nature of human society and relationships is reflected in and forms the basis of feminist epistemology. A central question in feminist epistemology has to do with **the problem of the objectivity of knowledge**. Objectivity as a feature of foundationalism requires that knowledge be abstract and certain.

This according to feminist epistemologists has led to an incomplete account of knowledge. For them, knowledge is incomplete without considering the multiple experiences of diverse groups in society and how their experiences are interrelated.

Various issues have inspired feminist interests in theories of knowledge. For instance, stereotyped perceptions of women's nature and actions based upon them. This, according to Carol Gould (1983), 'counts amongst the most intransigent of constructs that shape women's experiences and make it difficult for women to move beyond domination'.

- To the feminist epistemologists, knowledge is incomplete without considering \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- The multiple experiences of diverse groups in society and how their experiences are interrelated.

## 7.2 Gender and Feminist Epistemology

Stereotyped perceptions of women's nature are of course continuous with stereotyping of any sort. Gender stereotyping can be defined as the constant portrayal of women and men, (in the

media or in books) occupying social roles according to the gender division of labour by portraying such stereotyping as 'normal' and natural.

Put in another way, gender stereotypes are structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and of men. They are beliefs held by individuals, (personal gender stereotypes) and are also shared patterns of thinking within a particular society (cultural gender stereotypes).

It could come in various forms, some re given in the table below:

**Table 7.1:** Forms of Gender Stereotypes with examples

	Forms of Gender Stereotypes	Examples
1	Personality traits	Women are emotional and men are not
2	Abilities	Men are good at mathematics while women are not
3	Role behaviour	Women are more likely than men to care for children
4	Occupations	Most nurses are female while most doctors are male

Gender stereotypes are 'bipolar' in the sense that women and men are perceived to have opposing personal qualities. Some researchers, however, feel that the core meaning of stereotypic beliefs about the sexes is best captured by the distinctions 'hard-soft', 'active-passive'.

Manifestations of such perceptions are perhaps best known as they come across in anthropological psychological and sociological studies. A close look at those studies show that their implications are as much ontological in their structuring effects upon women's possibilities of being and epistemological in their constraints upon responsible knowing.

Indeed, such studies often work as self-fulfilling prophecies, leading people to be much as stereotype-governed as research takes them to be.

Again, with special references to stereotypes of women, feminists in several disciplines have documented the ways in which actions and attitudes shaped by such stereotypes structure the ways in which women are perceived and know, and come thereby to know themselves.

- Structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and of men is known as?
  - A. Feminist epistemologists
  - B. Gender stereotypes
  - C. Gender qualities
  - D. Gender Epistemology
- Answer is (B) Gender Stereotypes

Much of this documentation is philosophically pertinent because it shows precisely with reference to other peoples experiences of themselves as participants in the world, that is, how one comes to know oneself through perceived doctrines has profound effects on one's possibilities of being.

In a complex process of reciprocal structuring and restructuring, what a person comes to believe that he/she is affects what that person can know and to a large extent, structures what he/she is.

You should note that the point is not that if stereotypes are removed then experiences will present itself 'pure and tainted' but rather that experience is always mediated by the location of the experiencing subjects in terms of time, place, culture and environment and it is always shaped by unconscious considerations and motivations.

The discussions thus far are drawn from patriarchal structures where stereotypes are imposed upon women from the vantage point of male experience. Patriarchy inputs political, moral and social meanings to sexual differentiation.

It is the male domination of ownership and control at all levels in society, which maintains and operates the system of gender discrimination. This system of control is justified in terms of patriarchal ideology.

Patriarchal ideology is the system of social values and norms, often embedded in law, tradition and religious beliefs which support the perpetuation of gender discrimination, claiming that the man is the head of the household with sexual rights over women.

On the level of epistemological discourse, many feminists have condemned patriarchy for creating and reflecting an exclusively masculine view of the world and for rendering women's experiences and their perspectives invisible.

- Patriarchy inputs \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ meanings to sexual differentiation.
- Political, Moral and Social meanings.

According to one of them, 'patriarchal thought is characterized by the imposition of divisions and oppositions on the disparate flow of experience: reason versus emotions, mind versus body, subject versus object'.

As a result, one side of each pair is favoured over the other, establishing a hierarchy of classifications in which what is associated with the male is given priority over what represents the female.

Their conclusion, therefore, is that patriarchy establishes male dominance in its basic accounts of the world, its standards of knowledge and judgment as well as in its concrete institutions and practices.

To this end, feminists have produced competing theories about the general forms of inequality and the broader structures, belief systems and institutions which produce and organize particular experiences in order to analyze, understand and hopefully challenge women's exclusion.

Prominent among these theories is the one labelled '**Feminist Epistemology**', which concerns how gender influences our ways of knowing. Feminists have argued that 'mainstream epistemologies systematically exclude the possibility that women can be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge, for example;

- The voice of science is masculine.
- History is written from only the point of view of men of the dominant class and race.
- The subject of traditional epistemology is always assumed to be a man.

Various practitioners of feminist Epistemology argue that dominant knowledge practices disadvantage women by:

1. Excluding them from inquiry
2. Denying them epistemic authority
3. Denigrating their 'feminine cognitive styles and models of knowledge
4. Producing theories of women that represent them as inferior
5. Deviant or significant only in ways that serve male interest
6. Producing theories of social phenomena that render women's activities and interests or gendered power relations invisible and producing knowledge (science and technology) that is not useful for people in subordinate positions or that reinforce gender and other social hierarchies.

Feminist epistemologists are mainly concerned with scientific knowledge as a way of challenging the absolutism and objectivity of foundationalism. They trace the failure of foundationalism to flawed conceptions of gender knowers' objectivity and scientific methodology.

They, however, offered various arguments which they present as essential arguments in feminist epistemology.

■ What are some of the proofs to show that mainstream epistemologies systematically exclude the possibility that women can be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge?

□ Some of the proofs are:

The voice of science is masculine.

History is written from only the point of view of men of the dominant class and race.

The subject of traditional epistemology is always assumed to be a man.

### 7.3 Main Feminists Arguments in Epistemology

The major arguments in feminist discourse are:

1. Feminist epistemology rejects the notion that there is an Archimedean point from which knowledge is acquired. It argues that the existence of such an Archimedean point that abstracts the knower from the known will only lead to an incomplete account of knowledge.

Hence we should focus on the specificities of our local experience. Also, feminist epistemologists argue that epistemological assumptions within scientific discourse reconstruct a stereotypical view of women and men. This has resulted in various forms of dualisms with the other pole serving as the dominated one.

2. Feminist epistemology also questioned the objectivity of science with its attendant neutrality. They argue that science is not the neutral, dispassionate, value-free pursuit of truth. Science, like all knowledge, is culturally constructed, produced under particular social and historical conditions.

The dissatisfaction of feminist epistemologists is with modern science (scientific knowledge). Hence the notion that the project of modern science crystallizes or informs 'masculinist' models of thinking has been a prominent theme in some recent writings.

What we encounter in Cartesian rationalism, says Karl Stern 'is the pure masculinisation of thought.'<sup>8</sup> The scientific model of knowing says Sandra Harding, represents a 'super-masculinization of rational knowledge.

The specific consciousness we call scientific, western and modern, James Hillman claims, 'is the long sharpened tool of the masculine mind that has discarded parts of its own substance calling it 'eve', female and inferior'.

Understanding the development of Cartesian objectivity and modern science in general will give us some textual support to these insights on feminist epistemology and as a result clarify their importance.

3. There are various forms of the feminist critique of science and its objectivity. One aspect of this critique is the picture of scientific objectivity as expressing an essentially male approach to knowledge and the world. Thus, Ruth Bleier explains that :

*Science is the male intellect: the active knowing subject: its relationship to nature the passive object of knowledge – is one of manipulation, control and domination: it is the relationship of man to woman, of culture to nature.*

Bleier's reason for the above conclusion is that many people have been led to believe that the discourse on women and their nature, a discourse like all others from which women have been absent and excluded, has been an objective investigation because it was conducted by science.



**Figure 7.2:** Ruth Bleier

**Source:** [http://www.housing.wisc.edu/media/photos/reslife/rh/phillips/ruth\\_bleier-large.jpg](http://www.housing.wisc.edu/media/photos/reslife/rh/phillips/ruth_bleier-large.jpg)

But science itself, the tool for investigating such natural objects as woman, has always been defined as the expression of the male mind; dispassionate, objective, impersonal, transcendent. The female mind untamed, emotional, subjective and personal is incompatible with science. The presumption here, therefore, is that science, by its very nature is inherently masculine.

Catherine Mackinnon also speaks of objectivity as ‘the ostensibly non-involved stance, as the male epistemological stance which does not comprehend its own perspectivity.

Another aspect of the critique of objectivity that is relevant to this study is the suggestion that part of the problem about objectivity and thus about how women have been traditionally perceived and described may well have to do with the dualistic categories into which we have tried to place our knowledge.

The claim here is that science rests on and is defined by the assumption of a polarity between man and woman that structures our view of and investigations into what constitutes men’s and women’s nature.

More generally, these polarities underlie all our views about what constitutes knowledge and indeed structure our investigations of the nature of human thought, behaviour and organization.

The consistency with which our culture accepts these dualisms as constituting not only science but art, philosophy, literature and indeed our customs and institutions is standardly taken to reflect the fact that these dualisms really exist in the world and specifically in the natures of men and women—a kind of realism with respect to the male/female polarity.

Feminists argue that to treat these polarities as representing contradictory and mutually exclusive spheres is to propound false dichotomies, not because these ways of classifying fails to order our

perceptions but because they order them in ways that leave out or under-represent or undervalue women's experience. Interestingly, this critique is by no means limited to science and its feature of objectivity.

For Catherine Mackinnon, this not only extends to epistemology but also the traditional bifurcation between reason and emotion with knowledge made dependent upon reason alone; this has led to an incomplete account of knowledge.

4. Feminist epistemologists take issue with certain epistemic notions like objectivity, universality and rationality claiming that they are all male notions. Feminist epistemologies, like other anti-foundationalist tendencies in contemporary epistemology have grown out of critical interrogations of the universalistic presumptions of the theories of knowledge of the western philosophical tradition.

Skeptical about the very possibility of developing a theory of knowledge in general whose claims to universal validity are premised on its abstraction from the specificities of human experience, feminist epistemologists have insisted on the constitutive role that epistemic local plays in the making and evaluating of knowledge claims.

It is with the foundationalist project of seeking an absolute grounding for knowledge and its resultant consequence (that of abstract individualism that many feminists take issue.

5. Another central argument which is closely linked to the above is that feminist epistemologists are of the opinion that central epistemological regulatory notions like objectivity, good method, and rationality and the abstract individual are conceptualized to favour men.

As a result, they, like the anti-foundationalists concentrate less on formal universal conditions for making and justifying knowledge and emphasize the specificities of knowledge construction. Apart from conceptualizing these notions to favour men, traditional epistemology fails to take into cognizance real life situations.

It tries to define knowledge without taking into cognizance knowledge for whom, it also tries to define justification without considering specific circumstances.

6. Many feminist epistemologists are skeptical of the model of knowledge that foundationalism has bequeathed to modern science. According to them, the type of knowledge that Descartes has bequeathed to modern science and of which he is often explicitly described as the father, is based on clarity, dispassion and detachment as against involvement, perceptivity and connectedness.
7. Finally, feminist epistemologists also take issue with the problem of Androcentrism in science. Androcentrism occurs when theories take men's lives or masculinity to set the

norm for humans or animals generally with female difference either ignored or represented as deviant.

It also occurs when male activities or predicaments are represented as the primary causes or sites of important changes without regard to the roles of females in initiating or facilitating changes. One can also describe a situation where phenomena are viewed from the perspective of men's lives without regard to how women see them differently as androcentric.

Similarly, a knowledge practice can be said to be androcentric if it reflects an orientation geared to specifically or typically male interests or male lives.

Androcentrism can appear in knowledge practice in at least two ways:

In the content of theories or research programmes and in the interests that lead inquirers to frame their research in certain terms or around certain problems.

Feminist have advanced feminist epistemology most fully and persuasively by exposing androcentrism in the content of social-scientific and biological theories.

You should note at this point that men and women do have some gender-specific experiences and personal knowledge due to their different socialization and social status. Such experiences and forms of knowledge can be fruitfully brought to bear upon theoretical inquiry.

It is, therefore, not surprising that women researchers have exposed and criticized androcentrism in theories much more than men have. Women researchers, like feminist epistemologists, base their argument on the social construction of science, a particularly important subject because of the deep and central ways that scientific knowledge shapes western ways of knowing.

According to this argument, it is impossible for science or scientists to be otherwise, since science is a social activity and a cultural product created by persons who live in the world of science, as well as in the societies that bred them.

Similarly, **Sandra Harding** explains that scientific processes are not transparent; they necessarily permit cultural and social values and interests to contribute to the descriptions and explanations of nature's order. Thus, gender values and interests too could have shaped practices and claims.

## Summary of Study Session 7

In Study Session 7, you have learnt that:

Feminist epistemology is a branch of social epistemology that studies the various influences of norms and conceptions of gender and gendered interests and experiences on the production of knowledge.

Objectives of Feminist Epistemology includes

Incorporating the experiences of women within the epistemological framework and explaining the achievements of feminist criticism of science which is devoted to revealing sexism and androcentrism in theoretical inquiry among others.

Gender stereotyping can be defined as the constant portrayal of women and men, (in the media or in books) occupying social roles according to the gender division of labour by portraying such stereotyping as 'normal' and natural.

Patriarchal ideology is the system of social values and norms, often embedded in law, tradition and religious beliefs which support the perpetuation of gender discrimination, claiming that the man is the head of the household with sexual rights over women.

Feminist Epistemology concerns how gender influences our ways of knowing. Feminists have argued that 'mainstream epistemologies systematically exclude the possibility that women can be 'knowers' or agents of knowledge.

One of the major arguments in feminist is that Feminist epistemology rejects the notion that there is an Archimedean point from which knowledge is acquired.

## Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 7

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

### SAQ 7.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 7.1)

Highlight the aims of the feminists in an attempt to construct a new epistemology.

### SAQ 7.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 7.2)

What are the main issues that led to the development of feminist epistemology?

### SAQ 7.3 (Tests Learning Outcomes 7.3)

What are the main arguments often put forward by feminists in their attempt to criticize traditional ethical theories? How convincing are these arguments?

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## Study Session 8: Gender and the Environment

### Introduction

In the previous study session, issues in feminist epistemology were examined. You discovered that certain dichotomies as they are being construed in gender discourse have epistemological implications.

In this study session, the theme of dominance operating in the relationships of men over women, humanity over nature, the revolutionary nature of eco-feminism that seeks to overthrow both types of dominance, (because each of them is oppressive), and also responses to a set of key problems brought about by two great social movements, feminist movement and the environmental movement shall be well discussed.

### Learning Outcomes for Study Session 8

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 Discuss critically the Eco-feminist Movement
- 8.2 Identify Arguments that Are Central to Ecofeminism
- 8.3 Highlight the Responses of some Feminists to the Arguments

### 8.1 The Eco-feminist Movement

The idea of a connection between the treatment of women and treatment of nature is one of the hallmarks of eco-feminism. In the view of its theorists, both women and nature are not left alone or venerated but are instead exploited.



**Figure 8.1:** Ecofeminism; Woman and Nature

**Source:** <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/ecofeminism/files/2011/01/woman-tree.jpg>

There are even many linguistic terms employed when people discuss natural resources. “Raping the land,” and “taming nature” are relatively common expressions. These ideas suggest nature is at once to be exploited and also to be tamed.

There are numerous people who believe these attitudes are quite similar to those about women in societies. These people rose to criticize these ideas.

Another element of eco-feminism is that exploitation of land, water or nature often creates significant impact for women, and the population at large. When poor farmers in certain parts of the world grow cash crops, they don’t provide enough food for families, and this leads to depletion of the earth and food shortages.

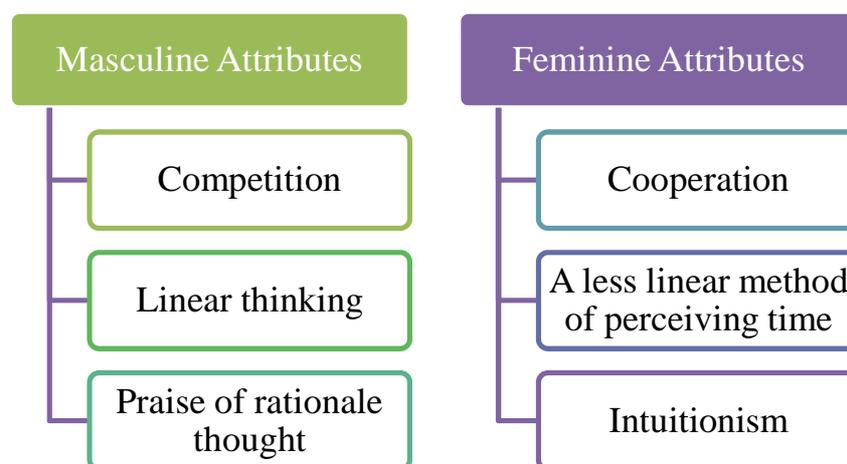
- What is the hallmark of eco-feminism?
- The idea of a connection between the treatment of women and treatment of nature, both women and nature are not left alone or venerated but are instead exploited.

Once land is viewed as only something to be used for profit (as may be common in a paternalistic mindset), instead of as a nurturing source that requires care, it deprives people of resources that provide basic dignities like the ability to obtain food or feed children.

On a larger scale, many of the activities undertaken that pollute the earth and do not steward it with consideration have a far-reaching impact for women.

An additional idea in eco-feminism is that paternalistic societies tend to favor what are traditionally masculine attributes to the cost of those considered traditionally feminine.

Some of these masculine and feminine attributes are highlighted in the figure below:



**Figure 8.2:** Some Attributes regarded as Masculine and Feminine

**Source:** Distance Learning Centre University of Ibadan

When these attributes regarded as feminine are lost due to predominantly masculine thinking, both the earth and its people suffer the consequences.

There's no one right way to be an eco-feminist, and the theories espoused by eco-feminism are varied and not exclusive to females. Women and men may be drawn to its ideas through feminist principles or through their work in environmental protection.

A few practical examples of eco-feminism include:

- Where women have joined together to bring awareness to practices that are inherently harmful.
- Ecofeminists might work to protest deforestation or create think tanks that help expose the potential harm and contamination of toxic chemicals.

## **8.2 Arguments that Are Central to Ecofeminism**

There are certain basic arguments that are central to eco-feminism.

- A. The first is that there is a link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. It is a worldview in which domination is seen to be a key axis of organisation, the enactment of which is explicitly embodied within the organizing principles of Western culture.
- B. Another argument that underlies the ecological feminist approach is that the ecological crisis cannot be attended to without reference to the underpinning assumption in which differences between entities, such as that between men and women, mind and body, humans and the rest of nature, are related to one another in a hierarchical fashion.

This hierarchy requires that one element of the pairing is given a superior position. The downside of the pairing is identified by its lack in regard to the up side. For instance, women are said to be 'less rational' than men, rather than men being seen to be 'less emotional' than women.

This is then exacerbated through a hyper-separation between the entities, in which qualities which they might share are ignored or minimized and qualities which differentiate them are exaggerated and over-emphasized.

To make the distinction between entities of the pairing even more extreme, any contribution which the 'underside' of the relationship makes is dismissed or 'backgrounded' as being unimportant and irrelevant.

In this way, the support a 'house' wife provides her husband in enabling him to carry out work outside the home with ease is ignored; likewise, the fact of human dependence on the earth for our very sustenance is disregarded.

Rather than being seen to contribute essential aspects of living, both women and nature are regarded as mere 'resources', background to the more 'worthy' furthering of human 'culture' and 'civilization'.

- What is the first argument of ecofeminism?
- The first argument is that there is a link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature.

In the construction of such dualisms, women have been historically associated with the downside of each emergent pairing. Thus, women are likened to be more akin to nature than culture, to body rather than to mind, to the primitive rather than to the civilized.

From their 'superior' position, men can appropriate and use nature, animals, and women, to their own means, without regard for the others' agency or autonomy.

**Plumwood** traced this split between nature and culture to the works of Plato, Aristotle and Descartes in Western Philosophy. According to her, this split is characterized by the following steps in thinking:

1. The construction of a normative human identity as 'mind' or 'reason', seeing all other aspects of being human, particularly aspects of embodiment, the emotional, the relational, as 'inferior' to rationality.
2. The construction of mind/reason as exclusive of or in opposition to nature.

These two positions, she argues were then enlarged by a third step put forward by Descartes, in which nature is constructed as being mindless, without agency, and completely neutral in terms of its own projects or consciousness.



**Figure 8.3:** Val Plumwood

**Source:** <http://iseethics.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/val-plumwood.jpg>

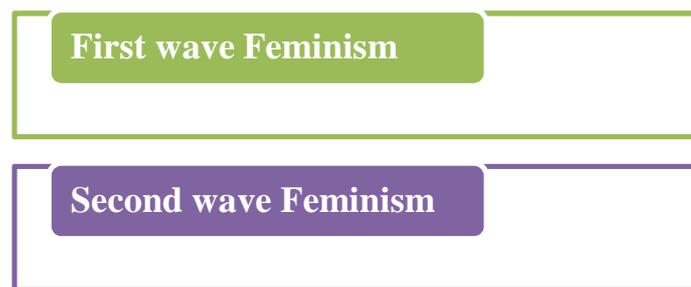
The implication of this is that there is a pervasive move towards an ever exalted position for the role of reason and consciousness in the history of Western philosophy. This is also coupled with an increasing location of those powers within male, constructed culture.

- What is the third step in thinking, put forward by Descartes?
- It is that in which nature is constructed as being mindless, without agency, and completely neutral in terms of its own projects or consciousness.

Removing ‘soul’ from nature enabled men to regard it as a resource, an entity devoid of autonomy or agency, open to man’s plundering.

### 8.3 Responses of Some Feminists to the Arguments

The question that should come to your mind at this point is what are the responses of some feminists to the above? Let us examine some of them. There are two different wave of responses as shown in the figure below:



**Figure 8.4:** The two wave of responses to the arguments  
**Source:** Distant Learning Center University of Ibadan

#### 8.2.1 First Wave Feminism

First wave feminism responded by arguing that to address the inherent problem often associated with the male-female dualism, there is need to leave as unquestioned the basic superiority of those ‘male attributes’ which are so highly prized as being what constitutes ‘being human’.

This suggests that women have just as much access to such qualities as do men. The implication of this is that women should deny any ‘female’ characteristics and be more male-like.

This does not address the inferior/superior stratification, and, as eco-feminists would point out, leaves nature in a subordinate, inferior position.

#### 8.2.2 Second Wave Feminism

Second-wave feminism moves away from the stance that women are capable of being ‘just like men’, and argues instead that there do exist actual, more than socially constructed, differences between the two genders.

However, the dualism inherent in patriarchy is adhered to as this form of feminism contends that women should assume the dominant role, with maleness in the inferior position. Proponents of this approach claim that it is time for female ways of being, which include emotionality, a greater connection with nature, qualities of nurturance and caring to assume the dominant position culturally.

Slogans such as ‘The Future is Female’ depict this kind of view. Again, this stance does not address the basic problem, which is of dualism and the hierarchical relationship between entities.

- How did the first wave feminism respond to the arguments?
- Their response was that women should deny any ‘female’ characteristics and be more male-like.

Plumwood suggests that neither stance is helpful in taking generative steps to a more effective way of living with and respecting difference.

As seen above, women have traditionally been symbolically and mythologically linked with ‘nature’. Although eco-feminists hold differing views about both the conceptualisation of such a link and appropriate ways of responding to it, the one point to which they would all agree is that representing either women or nature as inferior to men or ‘culture’ is wrong.

In addition to the responses of first and second wave feminism, there are three stances as to whether or not the link exists in the first place. These are given in table 8.1 below.

**Table 8.1:** The three stances to the existence of the link

1	Some feminists argue that such a connection between women and nature is wholly socially constructed, and that men have just as much access to ‘nature’ as women do.
2	Some feminists take an opposing view and suggest that indeed, women and men’s gender behaviours are completely biologically determined, and women are indeed, closer to nature as a result of their reproductive capabilities, something to which men can never approach.
3	A third position can be described as a mid-lying position. This feminist position holds that women’s reproductive capacity does indeed influence the position from which they experience their world, but that this is further historically and culturally determined. Furthermore, they would purport that both men and women are part of both nature and of culture.

The essential problem, according to Plumwood, is not about whether or not such a connection exists, but lies within the nature of dualism itself, which constructs relationships between men and women, and humans and nature as hierarchical.

Moving beyond this construction is the first step towards a healing process between humans and the natural world which eco-feminism seeks. As Plumwood notes:

*Overcoming the dualistic dynamic requires recognition of both continuity and difference; this means acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of the self.*

The above discussion suggests that some assumptions are central to eco-feminist approach. As noted by Warren, these include some of the idea given in the table below:

**Table 8.2:** Central Assumptions to Eco-Feminist Approach

1	Context is important in defining relationships
2	There is a shift from granting moral considerability to non-humans exclusively because of their similarities to humans, and instead a highly contextualised account is given
3	It is pluralistic and an attempts to maintain distinctive voices, including the voices of the individual aspects of nature or natural entities.
4	Theory is developed through the process, meaning emerges in patterns.
5	Inclusivity, what counts as ecology, and what counts as appropriate conduct is a matter of context.
6	There is no objective viewpoint.
7	There is a central place for values of care, love, trust, and appropriate reciprocity.
8	The idea of what it means to be human includes relational aspects.

## Summary of Study Session 8

In Study Session 8, you have learnt that:

1. Ecofeminism is the idea of a connection between the treatment of women and treatment of nature. In the view of its theorists, both women and nature are not left alone or venerated but are instead exploited.
2. An example of eco-feminism is where women have joined together to bring awareness to practices that are inherently harmful.
3. The first argument central to eco-feminism is that there is a link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, and the second argument is that the ecological crisis cannot be attended to without reference to the underpinning assumption in which differences between entities, such as that between men and women, mind and body, humans and the rest of nature, are related to one another in a hierarchical fashion.
4. First wave feminism responded to the arguments by implying that women should deny any 'female' characteristics and be more male-like while the second wave feminism responded by saying that there do exist actual, more than socially constructed, differences between the

two genders, therefore, it is time for female ways of being, which include emotionality, a greater connection with nature, qualities of nurturance and caring to assume the dominant position culturally.

This study session has attempted an extensive discussion of the views of some feminist and the eco-feminist movement. It started by looking at what actually led to the eco-feminist movement. The study was able to look at various reasons why dichotomies such as nature/culture tend to further marginalize women. It also looked at views of the first and second wave feminist as they relate to eco-feminism

### **Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 8**

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

#### **SAQ 8.1 (Tests Learning Outcomes 8.1)**

What led to the eco-feminist movement?

#### **SAQ 8.2 (Tests Learning Outcomes 8.2)**

What are the arguments that are central to eco-feminism

#### **SAQ 8.3 (Tests Learning Outcomes 8.3)**

Explain why the views of the first wave feminists differ from those of the second wave.

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